

A
KIPLING TREASURY
STORIES AND POEMS

BY
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An Habitation Enforced

My friend, if cause doth wrest thee,
Ere folly hath much oppressed thee,
Far from acquaintance kest thee
Where country may digest thee . . .
Thank God that so hath blessed thee,
And sit down, Robin, and rest thee.

THOMAS TUSSER.

It came without warning, at the very hour his hand was outstretched to crumple the Holz and Gunsberg Combine. The New York doctors called it overwork, and he lay in a darkened room, one ankle crossed above the other, tongue pressed into palate, wondering whether the next brain-surge of prickly fires would drive his soul from all anchorages. At last they gave judgment. With care he might in two years return to the arena, but for the present he must go across the water and do no work whatever. He accepted the terms. It was capitulation; but the Combine that had shivered beneath his knife gave him all the honours of war. Gunsberg himself, full of condolences, came to the steamer and filled the Chapins' suite of cabins with overwhelming flower-works.

'Smilax,' said George Chapin when he saw them.

'Fitz is right. I'm dead ; only I don't see why he left out the " In Memoriam " on the ribbons !'

'Nonsense !' his wife answered, and poured him his tincture. 'You'll be back before you can think.'

He looked at himself in the mirror, surprised that his face had not been branded by the hells of the past three months. The noise of the decks worried him, and he lay down, his tongue only a little pressed against his palate.

An hour later he said : 'Sophie, I feel sorry about taking you away from everything like this. I --I suppose we're the two loneliest people on God's earth to-night.'

Said Sophie his wife, and kissed him : 'Isn't it something to you that we're going together ?'

They drifted about Europe for months—sometimes alone, sometimes with chance-met gipsies of their own land. From the North Cape to the Blue Grotto at Capri they wandered, because the next steamer headed that way, or because some one had set them on the road. The doctors had warned Sophie that Chapin was not to take interest even in other men's interests ; but a familiar sensation at the back of the neck after one hour's keen talk with a Nauheim railway magnate saved her any trouble. He nearly wept.

'And I'm over thirty,' he cried ; 'with all I meant to do !'

'Let's call it a honeymoon,' said Sophie. 'D'you know, in all the six years we've been married, you've never told me what you meant to do with your life ?'

‘With my life? What’s the use? It’s finished now.’ Sophie looked up quickly from the Bay of Naples. ‘As far as my business goes, I shall have to live on my rents like that architect at San Moritz.’

‘You’ll get better if you don’t worry; and even if it takes time, there are worse things than—— How much have you?’

‘Between four and five million. But it isn’t the money. You know it isn’t. It’s the principle. How could you respect me? You never did, the first year after we married, till I went to work like the others. Our tradition and upbringing are against it. We can’t accept *those* ideals.’

‘Well, I suppose I married you for some sort of ideal,’ she answered, and they returned to their forty-third hotel.

In England they missed the alien tongues of Continental streets that reminded them of their own polyglot cities. In England all men spoke one tongue, speciously like American to the ear, but on cross-examination unintelligible.

‘Ah, but you have not seen England,’ said a lady with iron-grey hair. They had met her in Vienna, Bayreuth, and Florence, and were grateful to find her again at Claridge’s, for she commanded situations, and knew where prescriptions are most carefully made up. ‘You ought to take an interest in the home of our ancestors—as I do.’

‘I’ve tried for a week, Mrs. Shonts,’ said Sophie, ‘but I never get any further than tipping German waiters.’

'These are not the true type,' Mrs. Shonts went on. 'I know where you should go.'

Chapin pricked up his ears, anxious to run anywhere from the streets on which quick men something of his kidney did the business denied to him.

'We hear and we obey, Mrs. Shonts,' said Sophie, feeling his unrest as he drank the loathed British tea.

Mrs. Shonts smiled, and took them in hand. She wrote widely and telegraphed far on their behalf, till, armed with her letter of introduction, she drove them into that wilderness which is reached from an ash-barrel of a station called Charing Cross. They were to go to Rocketts—the farm of one Cloke, in the southern counties—where, she assured them, they would meet the genuine England of folklore and song.

Rocketts they found after some hours, four miles from a station, and, so far as they could judge in the bumpy darkness, twice as many from a road. Trees, kine, and the outlines of barns showed shadowy about them when they alighted, and Mr. and Mrs. Cloke, at the open door of a deep stone-floored kitchen, made them slowly welcome. They lay in an attic beneath a wavy whitewashed ceiling, and because it rained, a wood fire was made in an iron basket on a brick hearth, and they fell asleep to the chirping of mice and the whimper of flames.

When they woke it was a fair day, full of the noises of birds, the smell of box, lavender, and fried bacon, mixed with an elemental smell they had never met before.

‘This,’ said Sophie, nearly pushing out the thin casement in an attempt to see round the corner, ‘is—what did the hack—cabman say to the railway porter about my trunk—“quite on the top”?’

‘No; “a little bit of all right.” I feel farther away from anywhere than I’ve ever felt in my life. We must find out where the telegraph office is.’

‘Who cares?’ said Sophie, wandering about, hair-brush in hand, to admire the illustrated weekly pictures pasted on door and cupboard.

But there was no rest for the alien soul till he had made sure of the telegraph office. He asked the Clokes’ daughter, laying breakfast, while Sophie plunged her face in the lavender bush outside the low window.

‘Go to the stile a-top o’ the Barn field,’ said Mary, ‘and look across Pardons to the next spire. It’s directly under. You can’t miss it—not if you keep to the footpath. My sister’s the telegraphist there. But you’re in the three-mile radius, sir. The boy delivers telegrams directly to this door from Pardons village.’

‘One has to take a good deal on trust in this country,’ he murmured.

Sophie looked at the close turf, scarred only with last night’s wheels, at two ruts which wound round a rickyard, and at the circle of still orchard about the half-timbered house.

‘What’s the matter with it?’ she said. ‘Telegrams delivered to the Vale of Avalon, of course,’ and she beckoned in an earnest-eyed hound of

engaging manners and no engagements, who answered, at times, to the name of Rambler. He led them, after breakfast, to the rise behind the house where the stile stood against the skyline, and, 'I wonder what we shall find now,' said Sophie, frankly prancing with joy on the grass.

It was a slope of gap-hedged fields possessed to their centres by clumps of brambles. Gates were not, and the rabbit-mined, cattle-rubbed posts leaned out and in. A narrow path doubled among the bushes, scores of white tails twinkled before the racing hound, and a hawk rose, whistling shrilly.

'No roads, no nothing!' said Sophie, her short skirt hooked by briars. 'I thought all England was a garden. There's your spire, George, across the valley. How curious!'

They walked toward it through an all-abandoned land. Here they found the ghost of a patch of lucerne that had refused to die; there a harsh fallow surrendered to yard-high thistles; and here a breadth of rampant kelk feigning to be lawful crop. In the ungrazed pastures swaths of dead stuff caught their feet, and the ground beneath glistened with sweat. At the bottom of the valley a little brook had undermined its foot-bridge, and frothed in the wreckage. But there stood great woods on the slopes beyond—old, tall, and brilliant, like unfaded tapestries against the walls of a ruined house.

'All this within a hundred miles of London,' he said. 'Looks as if it had had nervous prostration, too.' The footpath turned the shoulder of a

slope, through a thicket of rank rhododendrons, and crossed what had once been a carriage drive, which ended in the shadow of two gigantic holm-oaks.

‘A house!’ said Sophie, in a whisper. ‘A colonial house!’

Behind the blue-green of the twin trees rose a dark-bluish brick Georgian pile, with a shell-shaped fan-light over its pillared door. The hound had gone off on his own foolish quests. Except for some stir in the branches and the flight of four startled magpies, there was neither life nor sound about the square house, but it looked out of its long windows most friendly.

‘Cha-armed to meet you, I’m sure,’ said Sophie, and curtsied to the ground. ‘George, this is history I can understand. *We* began here.’ She curtsied again.

The June sunshine twinkled on all the lights. It was as though an old lady, wise in three generations’ experience, but for the present sitting out, bent to listen to her flushed and eager grand-child.

‘I *must* look!’ Sophie tiptoed to a window, and shaded her eyes with her hand. ‘Oh, this room’s half-full of cotton-bales—wool, I suppose! But I can see a bit of the mantelpiece. George, do come! Isn’t that some one?’

She fell back behind her husband. The front door opened slowly, to show the hound, his nose white with milk, in charge of an ancient of days clad in a blue linen ephod curiously gathered on breast and shoulders.

‘Certainly,’ said George, half aloud. ‘Father Time himself. This is where he lives, Sophie.’

‘We came—,’ said Sophie weakly. ‘Can we see the house? I’m afraid that’s our dog.’

‘No, ’tis Rambler,’ said the old man. ‘He’s been at my swill-pail again. Staying at Rocketts, be ye? Come in. Ah! you runagate!’

The hound broke from him, and he tottered after him down the drive. They entered the hall—just such a high light hall as such a house should own. A slim-balustered staircase, wide and shallow and once creamy-white, climbed out of it under a long oval window. On either side delicately-moulded doors gave on to wool-lumbered rooms, whose sea-green mantelpieces were adorned with nymphs, scrolls, and Cupids in low relief.

‘What’s the firm that makes these things?’ cried Sophie, enraptured. ‘Oh, I forgot! These must be the originals. Adams, is it? I never dreamed of anything like that steel-cut fender. Does he mean us to go everywhere?’

‘He’s catching the dog,’ said George, looking out. ‘We don’t count.’

They explored the first or ground floor, delighted as children playing burglars.

‘This is like all England,’ she said at last. ‘Wonderful, but no explanation. You’re expected to know it beforehand. Now, let’s try upstairs.’

The stairs never creaked beneath their feet. From the broad landing they entered a long, green-panelled room lighted by three full-length windows, which overlooked the forlorn wreck of a terraced garden, and wooded slopes beyond.

‘The drawing-room, of course.’ Sophie swam up and down it. ‘That mantelpiece—Orpheus and Eurydice—is the best of them all. Isn’t it marvellous? Why, the room seems furnished with nothing in it! How’s that, George?’

‘It’s the proportions. I’ve noticed it.’

‘I saw a Hepplewhite couch once’—Sophie laid her finger to her flushed cheek and considered. ‘With two of them—one on each side—you wouldn’t need anything else. Except—there must be one perfect mirror over that mantelpiece.’

‘Look at that view. It’s a framed Constable,’ her husband cried.

‘No; it’s a Morland—a parody of a Morland. But about that couch, George. Don’t you think Empire might be better than Hepplewhite. Dull gold against that pale green? It’s a pity they don’t make spinets nowadays.’

‘I believe you can get them. Look at that oak wood behind the pines.’

“While you sat and played toccatas stately at the clavichord,” Sophie hummed, and, head on one side, nodded to where the perfect mirror should hang.

Then they found bedrooms with dressing-rooms and powdering-closets, and steps leading up and down—boxes of rooms, round, square, and octagonal, with enriched ceilings and chased door-locks.

‘Now about servants. Oh!’ She had darted up the last stairs to the chequered darkness of the top floor, where loose tiles lay among broken laths, and the walls were scrawled with names,

sentiments, and hop records.' 'They've been keeping pigeons here,' she cried.

'And you could drive a buggy through the roof anywhere,' said George.

'That's what *I* say,' the old man cried below them on the stairs. 'Not a dry place for my pigeons at all.'

'But why was it allowed to get like this?' said Sophie.

'Tis with housen as teeth,' he replied. 'Let 'em go too far, and there's nothing *to* be done. Time was they was minded to sell her, but none would buy. She was too far away along from any place. Time was they'd ha' lived here theyselves, but they took and died.'

'Here?' Sophie moved beneath the light of a hole in the roof.

'Nah—none dies here excep' falling off ricks and such. In London they died.' He plucked a lock of wool from his blue smock. 'They was no staple—neither the Elphicks nor the Moones. Shart and brittle all of 'em. Dead they be seventeen year, for I've been here caretakin' twenty-five.'

'Who does all the wool belong to downstairs?' George asked.

'To the estate. I'll show you the back parts if ye like. You're from America, ain't ye? I've had a son there once myself.' They followed him down the main stairway. He paused at the turn and swept one hand towards the wall. 'Plenty room here for your coffin to come down. Seven foot and three men at each end wouldn't brish the

paint. If I die in my bed they'll 'ave to up-end me like a milk-can. 'Tis all luck, d'ye see?'

He led them on and on, through a maze of back-kitchens, dairies, larders, and sculleries, that melted along covered ways into a farm-house, visibly older than the main building, which again rambled out among barns, byres, pig-pens, stalls and stables to the dead fields behind.

'Somehow,' said Sophie, sitting exhausted on an ancient well-curb—'somehow one wouldn't insult these lovely old things by filling them with hay.'

George looked at long stone walls upholding reaches of silvery-oak weather-boarding; buttresses of mixed flint and bricks; outside stairs, stone upon arched stone; curves of thatch where grass sprouted; roundels of house-leeked tiles, and a huge paved yard populated by two cows and the repentant Rambler. He had not thought of himself or of the telegraph office for two and a half hours.

'But why,' said Sophie, as they went back through the crater of stricken fields,—'why is one expected to know everything in England? Why do they never tell?'

'You mean about the Elphicks and the Moones?' he answered.

'Yes—and the lawyers and the estate. Who are they? I wonder whether those painted floors in the green room were real oak. Don't you like us exploring things together—better than Pompeii?'

George turned once more to look at the view.

‘Eight hundred acres go with the house—the old man told me. Five farms altogether. Rocketts is one of ’em.’

‘I like Mrs. Cloke. But what is the old house called?’

George laughed. ‘That’s one of the things you’re expected to know. He never told me.’

The Clokes were more communicative. That evening and thereafter for a week they gave the Chapins the official history, as one gives it to lodgers, of Friars Pardon the house and its five farms. But Sophie asked so many questions, and George was so humanly interested, that, as confidence in the strangers grew, they launched, with observed and acquired detail, into the lives and deaths and doings of the Elphicks and the Moones and their collaterals, the Haylings and the Torrells. It was a tale told serially by Cloke in the barn, or his wife in the dairy, the last chapters reserved for the kitchen o’ nights by the big fire, when the two had been half the day exploring about the house, where old Iggulden, of the blue smock, cackled and chuckled to see them. The motives that swayed the characters were beyond their comprehension; the fates that shifted them were gods they had never met; the side-lights Mrs. Cloke threw on act and incident were more amazing than anything in the record. • Therefore the Chapins listened delightedly, and blessed Mrs. Shonts.

‘But why—why—*why*—did So-and-so do so-and-so?’ Sophie would demand from her seat by the pothook; and Mrs. Cloke would answer, smoothing her knees, ‘For the sake of the place.’

'I give it up,' said George one night in their own room. 'People don't seem to matter in this country compared to the places they live in. The way *she* tells it, Friars Pardon was a sort of Moloch.'

'Poor old thing!' They had been walking round the farms as usual before tea. 'No wonder they loved it. Think of the sacrifices they made for it. Jane Elphick married the younger Torrell to keep it in the family. The octagonal room with the moulded ceiling next to the big bedroom was hers. Now what did *he* tell you while he was feeding the pigs?' said Sophie.

'About the Torrell cousins and the uncle who died in Java. They lived at Burnt House—behind High Pardons, where that brook is all blocked up.'

'No; Burnt House is under High Pardons Wood, *before* you come to Gale Anstey,' Sophie corrected.

'Well, old man Cloke said——'

Sophie threw open the door and called down into the kitchen, where the Clokes were covering the fire: 'Mrs. Cloke, isn't Burnt House under High Pardons?'

'Yes, my dear, of course,' the soft voice answered absently. A cough. 'I beg your pardon, Madam. What was it you said?'

'Never mind. I prefer it the other way,' Sophie laughed, and George re-told the missing chapter as she sat on the bed.

'Here to-day an' gone to-morrow,' said Cloke warningly. 'They've paid their first month, but we've only that Mrs. Shonts' letter for guarantee.'

‘None she sent never cheated us yet. It slipped out before I thought. She’s a most humane young lady. They’ll be going away in a little. An’ *you’ve* talked a lot too, Alfred.’

‘Yes, but the Elphicks are all dead. No one can bring my loose talking home to me. But why do they stay on and stay on so?’

In due time George and Sophie asked each other that question, and put it aside. They argued that the climate—a pearly blend, unlike the hot and cold ferocities of their native land—suited them, as the thick stillness of the nights certainly suited George. He was saved even the sight of a metalled road, which, as presumably leading to business, wakes desire in a man; and the telegraph office at the village of Friars Pardon, where they sold picture post-cards and peg-tops, was two walking miles across the fields and woods. For all that touched his past among his fellows, or their remembrance of him, he might have been in another planet; and Sophie, whose life had been very largely spent among husbandless wives of lofty ideals, had no wish to leave this present of God. The unhurried meals, the foreknowledge of deliciously empty hours to follow, the breadths of soft sky under which they walked together and reckoned time only by their hunger or thirst; the good grass beneath their feet that cheated the miles; their discoveries, always together, amid the farms—Griffons, Rocketts, Burnt House, Gale Anstey, and the Home Farm, where Iggulden of the blue smock-frock would waylay them, and they would ransack the old house once more; the

long wet afternoons when they tucked up their feet on the bedroom's deep window-sill over against the apple-trees, and talked together as never till then had they found time to talk—these things contented her soul, and her body throve.

'Have you realised,' she asked one morning, 'that we've been here absolutely alone for the last thirty-four days?'

'Have you counted them?' he asked.

'Did you like them?' she replied.

'I must have. I didn't think about them. Yes, I have. Six months ago I should have fretted myself sick. Remember at Cairo? I've only had two or three bad times. Am I getting better, or is it senile decay?'

'Climate, all climate.' Sophie swung her new-bought English boots, as she sat on the stile overlooking Friars Pardon, behind the Clokes' barn.

'One must take hold of things though,' he said, 'if it's only to keep one's hand in.' His eyes did not flicker now as they swept the empty fields. 'Mustn't one?'

'Lay out a Morristown links over Gale Anstey. I dare say you could hire it.'

'No, I'm not as English as that—nor as Morristown. Cloke says all the farms here could be made to pay.'

'Well, I'm Anastasia 'in the *Treasure of Franchard*. I'm content to be alive and purr. There's no hurry.'

'No.' He smiled. 'All the same, I'm going to see after my mail.'

'You promised you wouldn't have any.'

‘There’s some business coming through that’s amusing me. Honest. It doesn’t get on my nerves at all.’

‘Want a secretary?’

‘No, thanks, old thing! Isn’t that quite English?’

‘Too English! Go away.’ But none the less in broad daylight she returned the kiss. ‘I’m off to Pardons. I haven’t been to the house for nearly a week.’

‘How’ve you decided to furnish Jane Elphick’s bedroom?’ he laughed, for it had come to be a permanent Castle in Spain between them.

‘Black Chinese furniture and yellow silk brocade,’ she answered, and ran downhill. She scattered a few cows at a gap with a flourish of a ground-ash that Iggulden had cut for her a week ago, and singing as she passed under the holm-oaks, sought the farm-house at the back of Friars Pardon. The old man was not to be found, and she knocked at his half-opened door, for she needed him to fill her idle forenoon. A blue-eyed sheep-dog, a new friend, and Rambler’s old enemy, crawled out and besought her to enter.

Iggulden sat in his chair by the fire, a thistle-spud between his knees, his head drooped. Though she had never seen death before, her heart, that missed a beat, told her that he was dead. She did not speak or cry, but stood outside the door, and the dog licked her hand. When he threw up his nose, she heard herself saying: ‘Don’t howl! Please don’t begin to howl, Scottie, or I shall run away!’

She held her ground while the shadows in the rickyard moved toward noon; sat after a while on the steps by the door, her arms round the dog's neck, waiting till some one should come. She watched the smokeless chimneys of Friars Pardon slash its roofs with shadow, and the smoke of Iggulden's last lighted fire gradually thin and cease. Against her will she fell to wondering how many Moones, Elphicks, and Torrells had been swung round the turn of the broad hall stairs. Then she remembered the old man's talk of being 'up-ended like a milk-can,' and buried her face on Scottie's neck. At last a horse's feet clinked upon flags, rustled in the old grey straw of the rickyard, and she found herself facing the vicar—a figure she had seen at church declaiming impossibilities (Sophie was a Unitarian), in an unnatural voice.

'He's dead,' she said, without preface.

'Old Iggulden? I was coming for a talk with him.' The vicar passed in uncovered. 'Ah!' she heard him say. 'Heart-failure! How long have you been here?'

'Since a quarter to eleven.' She looked at her watch earnestly and saw that her hand did not shake.

'I'll sit with him now till the doctor comes. D'you think you could tell him, and—yes, Mrs. Betts in the cottage with the wistaria next the blacksmith's? I'm afraid this has been rather a shock to you.'

Sophie nodded, and fled toward the village. Her body failed her for a moment; she dropped beneath a hedge, and looked back at the great

house. In some fashion its silence and stolidity steadied her for her errand.

Mrs. Betts, small, black-eyed and dark, was almost as unconcerned as Friars Pardon.

‘Yiss, yiss, of course. Dear me! Well, Iggulden he had had his day in my father’s time. Muriel, get me my little blue bag, please. Yiss, ma’am. They come down like ellow-branches in still weather. No warnin’ at all. Muriel, my bicycle’s be’ind the fowl-house. I’ll tell Dr. Dallas, ma’am.’

She trundled off on her wheel like a brown bee, while Sophie—heaven above and earth beneath changed—walked stiffly home, to fall over George at his letters, in a muddle of laughter and tears.

‘It’s all quite natural for *them*,’ she gasped. ‘“They come down like ellow-branches in still weather. Yiss, ma’am.” No, there wasn’t anything in the least horrible, only—only—Oh George, that poor shiny stick of his between his poor, thin knees! I couldn’t have borne it if Scottie had howled. I didn’t know the vicar was so—so sensitive. He said he was afraid it was ra-rather a shock. Mrs. Betts told me to go home, and I wanted to collapse on her floor. But I didn’t disgrace myself. I—I couldn’t have left him—could I?’

‘You’re sure you’ve took no ’arm?’ cried Mrs. Cloke, who had heard the news by farm-telegraphy, which is older but swifter than Marconi’s.

‘No. I’m perfectly well,’ Sophie protested.

‘You lay down till tea-time.’ Mrs. Cloke patted her shoulder. ‘*They*’ll be very pleased,

though she 'as 'ad no proper understandin' for twenty years.'

'They' came before twilight—a black-bearded man in moleskins, and a little palsied old woman, who chirruped like a wren.

'I'm his son,' said the man to Sophie, among the lavender bushes. 'We 'ad a difference twenty year back, and didn't speak since. But I'm his son all the same, and we thank you for the watching.'

'I'm only glad I happened to be there,' she answered, and from the bottom of her heart she meant it.

'We heard he spoke a lot o' you—one time an' another since you came. We thank you kindly,' the man added.

'Are you the son that was in America?' she asked.

'Yes, ma'am. On my uncle's farm, in Connecticut. He was what they call road-master there.'

'Whereabouts in Connecticut?' asked George over her shoulder.

'Veering Holler was the name. I was there six year with my uncle.'

'How small the world is!' Sophie cried. 'Why, all my mother's people come from Veering Hollow. There must be some there still—the Lashmars. Did you ever hear of them?'

'I remember hearing that name, seems to me,' he answered, but his face was blank as the back of a spade.

A little before dusk a woman in grey, striding

like a foot-soldier, and bearing on her arm a long pole, crashed through the orchard calling for food. George, upon whom the unannounced English worked mysteriously, fled to the parlour; but Mrs. Cloke came forward beaming. Sophie could not escape.

‘We’ve only just heard of it,’ said the stranger, turning on her. ‘I’ve been out with the otter-hounds all day. It was a splendidly sportin’ thing——’

‘Did you—er—kill?’ said Sophie. She knew from books she could not go far wrong here.

‘Yes, a dry bitch—seventeen pounds,’ was the answer. ‘A splendidly sportin’ thing of you to do. Poor old Iggulden——’

‘Oh—that!’ said Sophie, enlightened.

‘If there had been any people at Pardons it would never have happened. He’d have been looked after. But what can you expect from a parcel of London solicitors?’

Mrs. Cloke murmured something.

‘No. I’m soaked from the knees down. If I hang about I shall get chilled. A cup of tea, Mrs. Cloke, and I can eat one of your sandwiches as I go.’ She wiped her weather-worn face with a green and yellow silk handkerchief.

‘Yes, my lady!’ Mrs. Cloke ran and returned swiftly.

‘Our land marches with Pardons for a mile on the south,’ she explained, waving the full cup, ‘but one has quite enough to do with one’s own people without poachin’. Still, if I’d known, I’d have sent Dora, of course. Have you seen her this

afternoon, Mrs. Cloke? No? I wonder whether that girl did sprain her ankle. 'Thank you.' It was a formidable hunk of bread and bacon that Mrs. Cloke presented. 'As I was sayin', Pardons is a scandal! Lettin' people die like dogs. There ought to be people there who do their duty. You've done yours, though there wasn't the faintest call upon you. Good night. Tell Dora, if she comes, I've gone on.'

She strode away, munching her crust, and Sophie reeled breathless into the parlour, to shake the shaking George.

'Why did you keep catching my eye behind the blind? Why didn't you come out and do your duty?'

'Because I should have burst. Did you see the mud on its cheek?' he said.

'Once. I daren't look again. Who is she?'

'God—a local deity then. Anyway, she's another of the things you're expected to know by instinct.'

Mrs. Cloke, shocked at their levity, told them that it was Lady Conant, wife of Sir Walter Conant, Baronet, a large landholder in the neighbourhood, and if not God, at least His visible Providence.

George made her talk of that family for an hour.

'Laughter,' said Sophie afterward in their own room, 'is the mark of the savage. Why couldn't you control your emotions? It's all real to *her*.'

'It's all real to me. That's my trouble,' he answered in an altered tone. 'Anyway, it's real

enough to mark time with. Don't you think so ?'

'What d'you mean ?' she asked quickly, though she knew his voice.

'That I'm better. I'm well enough to kick.'

'What at ?'

'This !' He waved his hand round the one room. 'I must have something to play with till I'm fit for work again.'

'Ah !' She sat on the bed and leaned forward, her hands clasped. 'I wonder if it's good for you.'

'We've been better here than anywhere,' he went on slowly. 'One could always sell it again.'

She nodded gravely, but her eyes sparkled.

'The only thing that worries me is what happened this morning. I want to know how you feel about it. If it's on your nerves in the least we can have the old farm at the back of the house pulled down, or perhaps it has spoiled the notion for you ?'

'Pull it down ?' she cried. 'You've no business faculty. Why, that's where we could live while we're putting the big house in order. It's almost under the same roof. No ! What happened this morning seemed to be more of a—of a leading than anything else. There *ought* to be people at Pardons. Lady Conant's quite right.'

'I was thinking more of the woods and the roads. I could double the value of the place in six months.'

'What do they want for it ?' She shook her head, and her loosened hair fell glowingly about her cheeks.

Seventy-five thousand dollars. They'll take sixty-eight.'

'Less than half what we paid for our old yacht when we married. And we didn't have a good time in her. You were——'

'Well, I discovered I was too much of an American to be content to be a rich man's son. You aren't blaming me for that?'

'Oh no. Only it was a very businesslike honeymoon. How far are you along with the deal, George?'

'I can mail the deposit on the purchase money to-morrow morning, and we can have the thing completed in a fortnight or three weeks—if you say so.'

'Friars Pardon — Friars Pardon!' Sophie chanted rapturously, her dark grey eyes big with delight. 'All the farms? Gale Anstey, Burnt House, Rocketts, the Home Farm, and Griffons? Sure you've got 'em all?'

'Sure.' He smiled.

'And the woods? High Pardons Wood, Lower Pardons, Suttons, Dutton's Shaw, Reuben's Ghyll, Maxey's Ghyll, and both the Oak Hangers? Sure you've got 'em all?'

'Every last stick. Why, you know them as well as I do.' He laughed. 'They say there's five thousand — a thousand pounds' worth of lumber — timber they call it — in the Hangers alone.'

'Mrs. Cloke's oven must be mended first thing, *and* the kitchen roof. I think I'll have all this whitewashed,' Sophie broke in, pointing to the

ceiling. 'The whole place is a scandal. Lady Conant is quite right. George, when did you begin to fall in love with the house? In the green room—that first day? I did.'

'I'm not in love with it. One must do something to mark time till one's fit for work.'

'Or when we stood under the oaks, and the door opened? Oh! Ought I to go to poor Iggulden's funeral?' She sighed with utter happiness.

'Wouldn't they call it a liberty—*now*?' said he.

'But I liked him.'

'But you didn't own him at the date of his death.'

'That wouldn't keep me away. Only, they made such a fuss about the watching'—she caught her breath—'it might be ostentatious from that point of view, too. Oh, George,'—she reached for his hand—'we're two little orphans moving in worlds not realised, and we shall make some bad breaks. But we're going to have the time of our lives.'

'We'll run up to London to-morrow and see if we can hurry those English law—solicitors. I want to get to work.'

They went. They suffered many things ere they returned across the fields in a fly one Saturday night, nursing a two by two-and-a-half box of deeds and maps—lawful owners of Friars Pardon and the five decayed farms therewith.

'I do most sincerely 'ope and trust you'll be 'appy, Madam,' Mrs. Cloke gasped, when she was told the news by the kitchen fire.

‘Goodness! It isn’t a marriage!’ Sophie exclaimed, a little awed; for to them the joke, which to an American means work, was only just beginning.

‘If it’s took in a proper spirit’—Mrs. Cloke’s eye turned toward her oven.

‘Send and have that mended to-morrow,’ Sophie whispered.

‘We couldn’t ’elp noticing,’ said Cloke slowly, ‘from the times you walked there, that you an’ your lady was drawn to it, but—but I don’t know as we ever precisely thought——’ His wife’s glance checked him.

‘That we were that sort of people,’ said George. ‘We aren’t sure of it ourselves yet.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Cloke, rubbing his knees, ‘just for the sake of saying something, perhaps you’ll park it?’

‘What’s that?’ said George.

‘Turn it all into a fine park like Violet Hill’—he jerked a thumb to westward—‘that Mr. Sangres bought. It was four farms, and Mr. Sangres made a fine park of them, with a herd of faller deer.’

‘Then it wouldn’t be Friars Pardon,’ said Sophie. ‘Would it?’

‘I don’t know as I’ve ever heard Pardons was ever anything but wheat, an’ wool. Only some gentlemen say that parks are less trouble than tenants.’ He laughed nervously. ‘But the gentry, o’ course, they keep on pretty much as they was used to.’

‘I see,’ said Sophie. ‘How did Mr. Sangres make his money?’

'I never rightly heard. It was pepper an' spices, or it may ha' been gloves. No. Gloves was Sir Reginald Liss at Marley End. Spices was Mr. Sangres. He's a Brazilian gentleman—very sunburnt like.'

'Be sure o' one thing. You won't 'ave any trouble,' said Mrs. Cloke, just before they went to bed.

Now the news of the purchase was told to Mr. and Mrs. Cloke alone at 8 P.M. of a Saturday. None left the farm till they set out for church next morning. Yet when they reached the church and were about to slip aside into their usual seats, a little beyond the font, where they could see the red-furred tails of the bell-ropes waggle and twist at ringing time, they were swept forward irresistibly, a Cloke on either flank (and yet they had not walked with the Clokes), upon the ever-retiring bosom of a black-gowned verger, who ushered them into a room of a pew at the head of the left aisle, under the pulpit.

'This,' he sighed reproachfully, 'is the Pardons' Pew,' and shut them in.

They could see little more than the choir boys in the chancel, but to the roots of the hair of their necks they felt the congregation behind mercilessly devouring them by look.

'*When the wicked man turneth away.*' The strong alien voice of the priest vibrated under the hammer-beam roof, and a loneliness unfelt before swamped their hearts, as they searched for places in the unfamiliar Church of England service. The Lord's Prayer—'Our Father, *which* art'—set the

seal on that desolation. Sophie found herself thinking how in other lands their purchase would long ere this have been discussed from every point of view in a dozen prints, forgetting that George for months had not been allowed to glance at those black and bellowing head-lines. Here was nothing but silence—not even hostility! The game was up to them; the other players hid their cards and waited. Suspense, she felt, was in the air, and when her sight cleared, she saw indeed, a mural tablet of a footless bird brooding upon the carven motto, ‘Wayte awhile—wayte awhile.’

At the Litany George had trouble with an unstable hassock, and drew the slip of carpet under the pew-seat. Sophie pushed her end back also, and shut her eyes against a burning that felt like tears. When she opened them she was looking at her mother’s maiden name, fairly carved on a blue flagstone on the pew floor :

Ellen Lashmar . ob. 1796 . ætat. 27.

She nudged George and pointed. Sheltered, as they kneeled, they looked for more knowledge, but the rest of the slab was blank.

‘Ever hear of her?’ he whispered.

‘Never knew any of us came from here.’

‘Coincidence?’

‘Perhaps. But it makes me feel better,’ and she smiled and winked away a tear on her lashes, and took his hand while they prayed for ‘all women labouring of child’—not ‘in the perils of childbirth’; and the sparrows who had found their way through the guards behind the stained-glass

windows chirped above the faded gilt and alabaster family tree of the Conants.

The baronet's pew was on the right of the aisle. After service its inhabitants moved forth without haste, but so as to effectively block a dusky person with a large family who champed in their rear.

'Spices, I think,' said Sophie, deeply delighted as the Sangres closed up after the Conants. 'Let 'em get away, George.'

But when they came out many folk whose eyes were one still lingered by the lych-gate.

'I want to see if any more Lashmars are buried here,' said Sophie.

'Not now. This seems to be show day. Come home quickly,' he replied.

A group of families, the Clokes a little apart, opened to let them through. The men saluted with jerky nods, the women with remnants of a curtsy. Only Iggulden's son, his mother on his arm, lifted his hat as Sophie passed.

'Your people,' said the clear voice of Lady Conant in her ear.

'I suppose so,' said Sophie, blushing, for they were within two yards of her; but it was not a question.

'Then that child looks as if it were coming down with mumps. You ought to tell the mother she shouldn't have brought it to church.'

'I can't leave 'er be'ind, my lady,' the woman said. 'She'd set the 'ouse afire in a minute, she's that forward with the matches. Ain't you, Maudie dear?'

‘Has Dr. Dallas seen her?’

‘Not yet, my lady.’

‘He must. You can’t get away, of course. M—m! My idiotic maid is coming in for her teeth to-morrow at twelve. She shall pick her up—at Gale Anstey, isn’t it?—at eleven.’

‘Yes. Thank you very much, my lady.’

‘I oughtn’t to have done it,’ said Lady Conant apologetically, ‘but there has been no one at Pardons for so long that you’ll forgive my poaching. Now, can’t you lunch with us? The vicar usually comes too. I don’t use the horses on a Sunday,’—she glanced at the Brazilian’s silver-plated chariot. ‘It’s only a mile across the fields.’

‘You—you’re very kind,’ said Sophie, hating herself because her lip trembled.

‘My dear,’ the compelling tone dropped to a soothing gurgle, ‘d’you suppose I don’t know how it feels to come to a strange county—country I should say—away from one’s own people? When I first left the Shires—I’m Shropshire, you know—I cried for a day and a night. But fretting doesn’t make loneliness any better. Oh, here’s Dora. She *did* sprain her leg that day.’

‘I’m as lame as a tree still,’ said the tall maiden frankly. ‘You ought to go out with the otter-hounds, Mrs. Chapin; I believe they’re drawing your water next week.’ •

Sir Walter had already led off George, and the vicar came up on the other side of Sophie. There was no escaping the swift procession or the leisurely lunch, where talk came and went in low-voiced eddies that had the village for their centre.

Sophie heard the vicar and Sir Walter address her husband lightly as Chapin ! (She also remembered many women known in a previous life who habitually addressed their husbands as Mr. Such-an-one.) After lunch Lady Conant talked to her explicitly of maternity as that is achieved in cottages and farm-houses remote from aid, and of the duty thereto of the mistress of Pardons.

A gate in a beech hedge, reached across triple lawns, let them out before tea-time into the unkempt south side of their land.

‘I want your hand, please,’ said Sophie as soon as they were safe among the beech boles and the lawless hollies. ‘D’you remember the old maid in *Providence and the Guitar* who heard the Commissary swear, and hardly reckoned herself a maiden lady afterward ? Because I’m a relative of hers. Lady Conant is——’

‘Did you find out anything about the Lashmars?’ he interrupted.

‘I didn’t ask. I’m going to write to Aunt Sydney about it first. Oh, Lady Conant said something at lunch about their having bought some land from some Lashmars a few years ago. I found it was at the beginning of last century.’

‘What did you say?’

‘I said, “Really, how interesting !” Like that. I’m not going to push myself forward. I’ve been hearing about Mr. Sangres’ efforts in that direction. And you ? I couldn’t see you behind the flowers. Was it very deep water, dear ?’

George mopped a brow already browned by outdoor exposure.

‘Oh no—dead easy,’ he answered. ‘I’ve bought Friars Pardon to prevent Sir Walter’s birds straying.’

A cock pheasant scuttered through the dry leaves and exploded almost under their feet. Sophie jumped.

‘That’s one of ’em,’ said George calmly.

‘Well, your nerves are better, at any rate,’ said she. ‘Did you tell ’em you’d bought the thing to play with?’

‘No. That was where my nerve broke down. I only made one bad break—I think. I said I couldn’t see why hiring land to men to farm wasn’t as much a business proposition as anything else.’

‘And what did they say?’

‘They smiled. I shall know what that smile means some day. They don’t waste their smiles. D’you see that track by Gale Anstey?’

They looked down from the edge of the hanger over a cup-like hollow. People by twos and threes in their Sunday best filed slowly along the paths that connected farm to farm.

‘I’ve never seen so many on our land before,’ said Sophie. ‘Why is it?’

‘To show us we mustn’t shut up their rights of way.’

‘Those cow-tracks we’ve been using cross lots?’ said Sophie forcibly.

‘Yes. Any one of ’em would cost us two thousand pounds each in legal expenses to close.’

‘But we don’t want to,’ she said.

‘The whole community would fight if we did.’

'But it's our land. We can do what we like.'

'It's *not* our land. We've only paid for it. We belong to it, and it belongs to the people—our people they call 'em. I've been to lunch with the English too.'

They passed slowly from one bracken-dotted field to the next—flushed with pride of ownership, plotting alterations and restorations at each turn; halting in their tracks to argue, spreading apart to embrace two views at once, or closing in to consider one. Couples moved out of their way, but smiling covertly.

'We shall make some bad breaks,' he said at last.

'Together, though. You won't let *any* one else in, will you?'

'Except the contractors. This syndicate handles this proposition by its little lone.'

'But you might feel the want of some one,' she insisted.

'I shall—but it will be you. It's business, Sophie, but it's going to be good fun.'

'Please God,' she answered flushing, and cried to herself as they went back to tea. 'It's worth it. Oh, it's worth it.'

The repairing and moving into Friars Pardon was business of the most varied and searching, but all done English fashion, without friction. Time and money alone were asked. The rest lay in the hands of beneficent advisers from London, or spirits, male and female, called up by Mr. and Mrs. Cloke from the wastes of the farms. In the

centre stood George and Sophie, a little aghast, their interests reaching out on every side.

'I ain't sayin' anything against Londoners,' said Cloke, self-appointed Clerk of the outer works, consulting engineer, head of the immigration bureau, and superintendent of woods and forests; 'but your own people won't go about to make more than a fair profit out of you.'

'How is one to know?' said George.

'I've years from now, or so on, maybe, you'll be lookin' over your first year's accounts, and, knowin' what you'll know then, you'll say: "Well, Billy Beartup"—or Old Cloke as it might be—"did me proper when I was new." No man likes to have that sort of thing laid up against him.'

'I think I see,' said George. 'But five years is a long time to look ahead.'

'I doubt if that oak Billy Beartup throwed in Reuben's Ghyll will be fit for her drawin'-room floor in less than seven,' Cloke drawled.

'Yes, that's my work,' said Sophie. (Billy Beartup of Griffons, a woodman by training and birth, a tenant farmer by misfortune of marriage, had laid his broad axe at her feet a month before.) 'Sorry if I've committed you to another eternity.'

'And we shan't even know where we've gone wrong with *your* new carriage-drive before that time either,' said Cloke, ever anxious to keep the balance true—with an ounce or two in Sophie's favour. The past four months had taught George better than to reply. The carriage road winding up the hill was his present keen interest. They set off to look at it, and the imported American

scraper which had blighted the none too sunny soul of 'Skim' Winsh, the carter. But young Iggulden was in charge now, and under his guidance, Buller and Roberts, the great horses, moved mountains.

'You lif' her like that, an' you tip her like that,' he explained to the gang. 'My uncle he was road-master in Connecticut.'

'Are they roads yonder?' said Skim, sitting under the laurels.

'No better than accommodation-roads. Dirt, they call 'em. They'd suit you, Skim.'

'Why?' said the incautious Skim.

''Cause you'd take no hurt when you fall out of your cart drunk on a Saturday,' was the answer.

'I didn't last time neither,' Skim roared.

After the loud laugh old Whybarne of Gale Anstey piped feebly, 'Well, dirt or no dirt, there's no denyin' Chapin knows a good job when he sees it. 'E don't build one day and dee-stroy the next, like that nigger Sangres.'

'*She's* the one that knows her own mind,' said Pinky, brother to Skim Winsh, and a Napoleon among carters who had helped to bring the grand piano across the fields in the autumn rains.

'She had ought to,' said Iggulden. 'Whoa, Buller! *She's* a Lashmar. They never was double-thinking.'

'Oh, you found that? Has the answer come from your uncle?' said Skim, doubtful whether so remote a land as America had posts.

The others looked at him scornfully. Skim was always a day behind the fair.

Iggulden rested from his labours. 'She's a Lashmar right enough. I started up to write to my uncle at once—the month after she said her folks came from Veering Holler.'

'Where there ain't any roads?' Skim interrupted, but none laughed.

'My uncle he married an American woman for his second, and she took it up like a—like the coroner. She's a Lashmar out of the old Lashmar place, 'fore they sold to Conants. She ain't no Toot Hill Lashmar, nor any o' the Crayford lot. Her folk come out of the ground here, neither chalk nor forest, but wildishers. They sailed over to America—I've got it all writ down by my uncle's woman—in eighteen hundred an' nothing. My uncle says they're all slow begetters like.'

'Would they be gentry yonder now?' Skim asked.

'Nah—there's no gentry in America, no matter how long you're there. It's against their law. There's only rich and poor allowed. They've been lawyers and such like over yonder for a hundred years—but she's a Lashmar for all that.'

'Lord! What's a hundred years?' said Whybarne, who had seen seventy-eight of them.

'An' they write too, from yonder—my uncle's woman writes—that you can still tell 'em by headmark. Their hair's 'foxy-red still—an' they throw out when they walk. *He's* in-toed—treads like a gipsy; but you watch, an' you'll see 'er throw out—like a colt.'

'Your trace wants taking up.' Pinky's large ears had caught the sound of voices, and as the

two broke through the laurels the men were hard at work, their eyes on Sophie's feet.

She had been less fortunate in her inquiries than Iggulden, for her Aunt Sydney of Meriden (a badged and certificated Daughter of the Revolution to boot) answered her inquiries with a two-paged discourse on patriotism, the leaflets of a Village Improvement Society, of which she was president, and a demand for an overdue subscription to a Factory Girls' Reading Circle. Sophie burned it all in the Orpheus and Eurydice grate, and kept her own counsel.

'What I want to know,' said George, when Spring was coming, and the gardens needed thought, 'is who will ever pay me for my labour? I've put in at least half a million dollars' worth already.'

'Sure you're not taking too much out of yourself?' his wife asked.

'Oh no; I haven't been conscious of myself all winter.' He looked at his brown English gaiters and smiled. 'It's all behind me now. I believe I could sit down and think of all that—those months before we sailed.'

'Don't—ah, don't!' she cried.

'But I must go back one day. You don't want to keep me out of business always—or do you?' He ended with a nervous laugh.

Sophie sighed as she drew her own ground-ash (of old Iggulden's cutting) from the hall rack.

'Aren't you overdoing it too? You look a little tired,' he said.

'You make me tired. I'm going to Rocketts

AN HABITATION ENFORCED

to see Mrs. Cloke about Mary.' (This was the sister of the telegraphist, promoted to be sewing-maid at Pardons.) 'Coming?'

'I'm due at Burnt House to see about the new well. By the way, there's a sore throat at Gale Anstey——'

'That's my province. Don't interfere. The Whybarne children always have sore throats. They do it for jujubes.'

'Keep away from Gale Anstey till I make sure, honey. Cloke ought to have told me.'

'These people don't tell. Haven't you learnt that yet? But I'll obey, me lord. See you later!'

She set off afoot, for within the three main roads that bounded the blunt triangle of the estate (even by night one could scarcely hear the carts on them), wheels were not used except for farm work. The footpaths served all other purposes. And though at first they had planned improvements, they had soon fallen in with the customs of their hidden kingdom, and moved about the soft-footed ways by woodland, hedgerow, and shaw as freely as the rabbits. Indeed, for the most part Sophie walked bareheaded beneath her helmet of chestnut hair; but she had been plagued of late by vague toothaches, which she explained to Mrs. Cloke, who asked some questions. How it came about Sophie never knew, but after a while behold Mrs. Cloke's arm was about her waist, and her head was on that deep bosom behind the shut kitchen door.

'My dear! my dear!' the elder woman almost

sobbed. 'An' d'you mean to tell me you never suspicioned? Why—why—where *was* you ever taught anything at all? Of *course* it is. It's what we've been only waitin' for, all of us. Time and again I've said to Lady——' she checked herself. 'An' now we shall be as we should be.'

'But—but—but——' Sophie whimpered.

'An' to see you buildin' your nest so busy—pianos and books—an' never thinkin' of a nursery!'

'No more I did.' Sophie sat bolt upright, and began to laugh.

'Time enough yet.' The fingers tapped thoughtfully on the broad knee. 'But—they must be strange-minded folk over yonder with you! Have you thought to send for your mother? She dead? My dear, my dear! Never mind! She'll be happy where she knows. 'Tis God's work. An' we was only waitin' for it, for you've never failed in your duty yet. It ain't your way. *What* did you say about my Mary's doings?' Mrs. Cloke's face hardened as she pressed her chin on Sophie's forehead. 'If any of your girls thinks to be 'ave arbitrary now, I'll—— But they won't, my dear. I'll see they do their duty too. Be sure you'll 'ave no trouble.'

When Sophie walked back across the fields, heaven and earth changed about her as on the day of old Iggulden's death. For an instant she thought of the wide turn of the staircase, and the new ivory-white paint that no coffin corner could scar, but presently the shadow passed in a pure wonder and bewilderment that made her reel.

She leaned against one of their new gates and looked over their lands for some other stay.

‘Well,’ she said resignedly, half aloud, ‘we must try to make him feel that he isn’t a third in our party,’ and turned the corner that looked over Friars Pardon, giddy, sick, and faint.

Of a sudden the house they had bought for a whim stood up as she had never seen it before, low-fronted, broad-winged, ample, prepared by course of generations for all such things. As it had steadied her when it lay desolate, so now that it had meaning from their few months of life within, it soothed and promised good. She went alone and quickly into the hall, and kissed either door-post, whispering: ‘Be good to me. *You* know! You’ve never failed in your duty yet.’

When the matter was explained to George, he would have sailed at once to their own land, but this Sophie forbade.

‘I don’t want science,’ she said. ‘I just want to be loved, and there isn’t time for that at home. Besides,’ she added, looking out of the window, ‘it would be desertion.’

George was forced to soothe himself with linking Friars Pardon to the telegraph system of Great Britain by telephone—three-quarters of a mile of poles, put in by Whybarne and a few friends. One of these was a foreigner from the next parish. Said he when the line was being run: ‘There’s an old ellum right in our road. Shall us throw her?’

‘Toot Hill parish folk, neither grace nor good

luck, God help 'em.' Old Whybarne shouted the local proverb from three poles down the line. '*We ain't goin' to lay any axe-iron to coffin-wood here—not till we know where we are yet awhile. Swing round 'er, swing round!*'

To this day, then, that sudden kink in the straight line across the upper pasture remains a mystery to Sophie and George. Nor can they tell why Skim Winsh, who came to his cottage under Dutton Shaw most musically drunk at 10.45 P.M. of every Saturday night, as his father had done before him, sang no more at the bottom of the garden steps, where Sophie always feared he would break his neck. The path was undoubtedly an ancient right of way, and at 10.45 P.M. on Saturdays Skim remembered it was his duty to posterity to keep it open—till Mrs. Cloke spoke to him—once. She spoke likewise to her daughter Mary, sewing-maid at Pardons, and to Mary's best new friend, the five-foot-seven imported London house-maid, who taught Mary to trim hats, and found the country dullish.

But there was no noise,—at no time was there any noise,—and when Sophie walked abroad she met no one in her path unless she had signified a wish that way. Then they appeared to protest that all was well with them and their children, their chickens, their roofs, their water-supply, and their sons in the police or the railway service.

'But don't you find it dull, dear?' said George, loyally doing his best not to worry as the months went by.

'I've been so busy putting my house in order

I haven't had time to think,' said she. 'Do you?'

'No—no. If I could only be sure of you.'

She turned on the green drawing-room's couch (it was Empire, not Hepplewhite after all), and laid aside a list of linen and blankets.

'It has changed everything, hasn't it?' she whispered.

'Oh Lord, yes. But I still think if we went back to Baltimore——'

'And missed our first real summer together. No thank you, me lord.'

'But we're absolutely alone.'

'Isn't that what I'm doing my best to remedy? Don't you worry. I like it—like it to the marrow of my little bones. You don't realise what her house means to a woman. We thought we were living in it last year, but we hadn't begun to. Don't you rejoice in your study, George?'

'I prefer being here with you.' He sat down on the floor by the couch and took her hand.

'Seven,' she said as the French clock struck. 'Year before last you'd just be coming back from business.'

He winced at the recollection, then laughed. 'Business! I've been at work ten solid hours to-day.'

'Where did you lunch? With the Conants?'

'No; at Dutton Shaw, sitting on a log, with my feet in a swamp. But we've found out where the old spring is, and we're going to pipe it down to Gale Anstey next year.'

'I'll come and see to-morrow. Oh, please open

the door, dear. I want to look down the passage. Isn't that corner by the stair-head lovely where the sun strikes in?' She looked through half-closed eyes at the vista of ivory-white and pale green all steeped in liquid gold.

'There's a step out of Jane Elphick's bedroom,' she went on—'and *his* first step in the world ought to be up. I shouldn't wonder if those people hadn't put it there on purpose. George, will it make any odds to you if he's a girl?'

He answered, as he had many times before, that his interest was his wife, not the child.

'Then you're the only person who thinks so.' She laughed. 'Don't be silly, dear. It's expected. I know. It's my duty. I shan't be able to look our people in the face if I fail.'

'What concern is it of theirs, confound 'em!'

'You'll see. Luckily the tradition of the house is boys, Mrs. Cloke says, so I'm provided for. Shall you ever begin to understand these people? I shan't.'

'And we bought it for fun—for fun?' he groaned. 'And here we are held up for goodness knows how long!'

'Why? Were you thinking of selling it?' He did not answer. 'Do you remember the second Mrs. Chapin?' she demanded.

This was a bold, brazen little black-browed woman—a widow for choice—who on Sophie's death was guilefully to marry George for his wealth and ruin him in a year. George being busy, Sophie had invented her some two years

after her marriage, and conceived she was alone among wives in so doing.

'You aren't going to bring *her* up again?' he asked anxiously.

'I only want to say that I should hate any one who bought Pardons ten times worse than I used to hate the second Mrs. Chapin. Think what we've put into it of our two selves.'

'At least a couple of million dollars. I know I could have made——' He broke off.

'The beasts!' she went on. 'They'd be sure to build a red-brick lodge at the gates, and cut the lawn up for bedding out. You must leave instructions in your will that *he's* never to do that, George, won't you?'

He laughed and took her hand again but said nothing till it was time to dress. Then he muttered: 'What the devil use is a man's country to him when he can't do business in it?'

Friars Pardon stood faithful to its tradition. At the appointed time was born, not that third in their party to whom Sophie meant to be so kind, but a godling; in beauty, it was manifest, excelling Eros, as in wisdom Confucius; an enhancer of delights, a renewer of companionships and an interpreter of Destiny. This last George did not realise till he met Lady Conant striding through Dutton Shaw a few days after the event.

'My dear fellow,' she cried, and slapped him heartily on the back, 'I can't tell you how glad we all are.—Oh, *she'll* be all right. (There's never been any trouble over the birth of an heir

at Pardons.) Now where the dooce is it?' She felt largely in her leather-bound skirt and drew out a small silver mug. 'I sent a note to your wife about it, but my silly ass of a groom forgot to take this. You can save me a tramp. Give her my love.' She marched off amid her guard of grave Airedales.

The mug was worn and dented: above the twined initials, G. L., was the crest of a footless bird and the motto: 'Wayte awhyle—wayte awhyle.'

'That's the other end of the riddle,' Sophie whispered, when he saw her that evening. 'Read her note. The English write beautiful notes.'

The warmest of welcomes to your little man. I hope he will appreciate his native land now he has come to it. Though you have said nothing we cannot, of course, look on him as a little stranger, and so I am sending him the old Lashmar christening mug. It has been with us since Gregory Lashmar, your great-grandmother's brother—

George stared at his wife.

'Go on,' she twinkled from the pillows.

—mother's brother, sold his place to Walter's family. We seem to have acquired some of your household gods at that time, but nothing survives except the mug and the old cradle, which I found in the potting-shed and am having put in order for you. I hope little George—Lashmar, he will be too, won't he?—will live to see his grandchildren cut their teeth on his mug.

Affectionately yours,

ALICE CONANT.

P.S.—How quiet you've kept about it all!

‘Well, I’m——’

‘Don’t swear,’ said Sophie. ‘Bad for the infant mind.’

‘But how in the world did she get at it? Have you ever said a word about the Lashmars?’

‘You know the only time—to young Iggulden at Rocketts—when Iggulden died.’

‘Your great-grandmother’s brother! She’s traced the whole connection—more than your Aunt Sydney could do. What does she mean about our keeping quiet?’

Sophie’s eyes sparkled. ‘I’ve thought that out too. We’ve got back at the English at last. Can’t you see that *she* thought that *we* thought my mother’s being a Lashmar was one of those things we’d expect the English to find out for themselves, and that’s impressed her?’ She turned the mug in her white hands, and sighed happily. “‘Wayte aw’hyle—wayte aw’hyle.” That’s not a bad motto, George. It’s been worth it.’

‘But still I don’t quite see——’

‘I shouldn’t wonder if they don’t think our coming here was part of a deep-laid scheme to be near our ancestors. *They’d* understand that. And look how they’ve accepted us, all of them.’

‘Are we so undesirable in ourselves?’ George grunted.

‘Be just, me lord. •That wretched Sangres man has twice our money. Can you see Marm Conant slapping him between the shoulders? Not by a jugful! The poor beast doesn’t exist!’

‘Do you think it’s that then?’ He looked

toward the cot by the fire where the godling snorted.

'The minute I get well I shall find out from Mrs. Cloke what every Lashmar gives in doles (that's nicer than tips) every time a Lashmite is born. I've done my duty thus far, but there's much expected of me.'

Entered here Mrs. Cloke, and hung worshipping over the cot. They showed her the mug and her face shone. 'Oh, now Lady Conant's sent it, it'll be all proper, ma'am, won't it? "George" of course he'd have to be, but seein' what he is we was hopin'—all your people was hopin'—it 'ud be "Lashmar" too, and that 'ud just round it out. A very 'andsome mug—quite unique, I should imagine. "Wayte awchyle—wayte awchyle." That's true with the Lashmars, I've heard. Very slow to fill their houses, they are. Most like Master George won't open 'is nursery till he's thirty.'

'Poor lamb!' cried Sophie. 'But how did you know my folk were Lashmars?'

Mrs. Cloke thought deeply. 'I'm sure I can't quite say, ma'am, but I've a belief likely that it was something you may have let drop to young Iggulden when you was at Rocketts. That *may* have been what give us an inkling. An' so it came out, one thing in the way o' talk leading to another, and those American people at Veering Holler was very obligin' with news, I'm told, ma'am.'

'Great Scott!' said George, under his breath. 'And this is the simple peasant!'

'Yiss,' Mrs. Cloke went on. 'An' Cloke was

only wonderin' this afternoon—your pillow's slipped, my dear, you mustn't lie that a-way—just for the sake o' sayin' something, whether you wouldn't think well now of getting the Lashmar farms back, sir. They don't rightly round off Sir Walter's estate. They come caterin' across us more. Cloke, 'e 'ud be glad to show you over any day.'

'But Sir Walter doesn't want to sell, does he?'

'We can find out from his bailiff, sir, but'—with cold contempt—'I think that trained nurse is just comin' up from her dinner, so I'm afraid we'll 'ave to ask you, sir . . . Now, Master George—Ai-ie! Wake a litty minute, lammie!'

A few months later the three of them were down at the brook in the Gale Anstey woods to consider the rebuilding of a footbridge carried away by spring floods. George Lashmar wanted all the bluebells on God's earth that day to eat, and Sophie adored him in a voice like to the cooing of a dove; so business was delayed.

'Here's the place,' said his father at last among the water forget-me-nots. 'But where the deuce are the larch-poles, Cloke? I told you to have them down here ready.'

'We'll get 'em down *if* you say so,' Cloke answered, with a thrust of the underlip they both knew.

'But I did say so. What on earth have you brought that timber-tug here for? We aren't building a railway bridge. Why, in America, half a dozen two-by-four bits would be ample.'

‘I don’t know nothin’ about that,’ said Cloke. ‘An’ I’ve nothin’ to say against larch—*if* you want to make a temp’ry job of it. I ain’t ‘ere to tell you what isn’t so, sir; an’ you can’t say I ever come creepin’ up on you, or tryin’ to lead you farther in than you set out——’

A year ago George would have danced with impatience. Now he scraped a little mud off his old gaiters with his spud, and waited.

‘All I say is that you can put up larch and make a temp’ry job of it; and by the time the young master’s married it’ll have to be done again. Now, I’ve brought down a couple of as sweet six-by-eight oak timbers as we’ve ever drawed. You put ‘em in an’ it’s off your mind for good an’ all. T’other way—I don’t say it ain’t right, I’m only just sayin’ what I think—but t’other way, he’ll no sooner be ‘married than we’ll ‘ave it *all* to do again. You’ve no call to regard my words, but you can’t get out of *that*.’

‘No,’ said George after a pause; ‘I’ve been realising that for some time. Make it oak then; we can’t get out of it.’

Brother Square-Toes

It was almost the end of their visit to the seaside. They had turned themselves out of doors while their trunks were being packed, and strolled over the Downs towards the dull evening sea. The tide was dead low under the chalk cliffs, and the little wrinkled waves grieved along the sands up the coast to Newhaven and down the coast to long, grey Brighton, whose smoke trailed out across the Channel.

They walked to The Gap where the cliff is only a few feet high. A windlass for hoisting shingle from the beach below stands at the edge of it. The Coastguard cottages are a little farther on, and an old ship's figure-head of a Turk in a turban stared at them over the wall.

'This time to-morrow we shall be at home, thank goodness,' said Una. 'I hate the sea!'

'I believe it's all right in the middle,' said Dan. 'The edges are the sorrowful parts.'

Cordery, the coastguard, came out of the cottage, levelled his telescope at some fishing-boats, shut it with a click and walked away. He grew smaller and smaller along the edge of the cliff,

where neat piles of white chalk every few yards show the path even on the darkest night.

‘Where’s Cordery going?’ said Una.

‘Half-way to Newhaven,’ said Dan. ‘Then he’ll meet the Newhaven coastguard and turn back. He says if coastguards were done away with, smuggling would start up at once.’

A voice on the beach under the cliff began to sing :

‘The moon she shined on Telscombe Tye—
On Telscombe Tye at night it was—
She saw the smugglers riding by,
A very pretty sight it was!’

Feet scrabbled on the flinty path. A dark, thin-faced man in very neat brown clothes and broad-toed shoes came up, followed by Puck.

‘Three Dunkirk boats was standin’ in!’

the man went on.

‘Hssh!’ said Puck. ‘You’ll shock these nice young people.’

‘Oh! Shall I? Mille pardons!’ He shrugged his shoulders almost up to his ears—spread his hands abroad, and jabbered in French. ‘No comprenny?’ he said. ‘I’ll give it you in Low German.’ And he went off in another language, changing his voice and manner so completely that they hardly knew him for the same person. But his dark beady-brown eyes still twinkled merrily in his lean face, and the children felt that they did not suit the straight, plain, snuffy-brown coat, brown knee-breeches, and broad-brimmed hat. His hair

was tied in a short pig-tail which danced wickedly when he turned his head.

‘Ha’ done!’ said Puck, laughing. ‘Be one thing or t’other, Pharaoh—French or English or German—no great odds which.’

‘Oh, but it is, though,’ said Una quickly. ‘We haven’t begun German yet, and—and we’re going back to our French next week.’

‘Aren’t you English?’ said Dan. ‘We heard you singing just now.’

‘Aha! That was the Sussex side o’ me. Dad he married a French girl out o’ Boulogne, and French she stayed till her dyin’ day. She was an Aurette, of course. We Lees mostly marry Aurrettes. Haven’t you ever come across the saying :

‘Aurrettes and Lees,
Like as two peas.
What they can’t smuggle,
They’ll run over seas’?

‘Then, are you a smuggler?’ Una cried; and, ‘Have you smuggled much?’ said Dan.

Mr. Lee nodded solemnly.

‘Mind you,’ said he, ‘I don’t uphold smuggling for the generality o’ mankind—mostly they can’t make a do of it—but I was brought up to the trade, d’ye see, in a lawful line o’ descent on’—he waved across the Channel—‘on both sides the water. ’Twas all in the families, same as fiddling. The Aurrettes used mostly to run the stuff across from Boulogne, and we Lees landed it here and ran it up to London Town, by the safest road.’

‘Then where did you live?’ said Una.

‘You mustn’t ever live too close to your business in *our* trade. We kept our little fishing smack at Shoreham, but otherwise we Lees was all honest cottager folk—at Warminghurst under Washington—Bramber way—on the old Penn estate.’

‘Ah!’ said Puck, squatted by the windlass. ‘I remember a piece about the Lees at Warminghurst, I do :

‘There was never a Lee to Warminghurst
That wasn’t a gipsy last and first.

I reckon that’s truth, Pharaoh.’

Pharaoh laughed. ‘Admettin’ that’s true,’ he said, ‘my gipsy blood must be wore pretty thin, for I’ve made and kept a worldly fortune.’

‘By smuggling?’ Dan asked.

‘No, in the tobacco trade.’

‘You don’t mean to say you gave up smuggling just to go and be a tobacconist!’ Dan looked so disappointed they all had to laugh.

‘I’m sorry; but there’s all sorts of tobacconists,’ Pharaoh replied. ‘How far out, now, would you call that smack with the patch on her foresail?’ He pointed to the fishing-boats.

‘A scant mile,’ said Puck after a quick look.

‘Just about. It’s seven fathom under her—clean sand. That was where Uncle Aurette used to sink his brandy kegs from Boulogne, and we fished ’em up and rowed ’em into The Gap here for the ponies to run inland. One thickish night in January of ’93, Dad and Uncle Lot and me came over from Shoreham in the smack, and we found

Uncle Aurette and the L'Estranges, my cousins, waiting for us in their lugger with New Year's presents from mother's folk in Boulogne. I remember Aunt Cécile she'd sent me a fine new red knitted cap, which I put on then and there, for the French was having their Revolution in those days, and red caps was all the fashion. Uncle Aurette tells us that they had cut off their King Louis' head, and, moreover, the Brest forts had fired on an English man-o'-war. The news wasn't a week old.

"That means war again, when we was only just getting used to the peace," says Dad. "Why can't King George's men and King Louis' men do on their uniforms and fight it out over our heads?"

"Me too, I wish that," says Uncle Aurette. "But they'll be pressing better men than themselves to fight for 'em. The press-gangs are out already on our side : you look out for yours."

"I'll have to bide ashore and grow cabbages for a while, after I've run this cargo ; but I do wish"—Dad says, going over the lugger's side with our New Year presents under his arm and young L'Estrange holding the lantern—"I just do wish that those folk which make war so easy had to run one cargo a month all this winter. It 'ud show 'em what honest wörk means."

"Well, I've warned ye," says Uncle Aurette. "I'll be slipping off now before your Revenue cutter comes. Give my love to sister and take care o' the kegs. It's thicking to southward."

'I remember him waving to us and young

Stephen L'Estrange blowing out the lantern. By the time we'd fished up the kegs the fog came down so thick Dad judged it risky for me to row 'em ashore, even though we could hear the ponies stamping on the beach. So he and Uncle Lot took the dinghy and left me in the smack playing on my fiddle to guide 'em back.

'Presently I heard guns. Two of 'em sounded mighty like Uncle Aurette's three-pounders. He didn't go naked about the seas after dark. Then come more, which I reckoned was Captain Giddens in the Revenue cutter. He was open-handed with his compliments, but he *would* lay his guns himself. I stopped fiddling to listen, and I heard a whole skyful o' French up in the fog—and a high bow come down on top o' the smack. I hadn't time to call or think. I remember the smack heeling over, and me standing on the gunwale pushing against the ship's side as if I hoped to bear her off. Then the square of an open port, with a lantern in it, slid by in front of my nose. I kicked back on our gunwale as it went under and slipped through that port into the French ship—me and my fiddle.'

'Gracious!' said Una. 'What an adventure!'

'Didn't anybody see you come in?' said Dan.

'There wasn't any one there. I'd made use of an orlop-deck port—that's the next deck below the gun-deck, which by rights should not have been open at all. The crew was standing by their guns up above. I rolled on to a pile of dunnage in the dark and I went to sleep. When I woke, men was talking all round me, telling each

other their names and sorrows just like Dad told me pressed men used to talk in the last war. Pretty soon I made out they'd all been hove aboard together by the press-gangs, and left to sort 'emselves. The ship she was the *Embuscade*, a thirty-six-gun Republican frigate, Captain Jean Baptiste Bompard, two days out of Le Havre, going to the United States with a Republican French Ambassador of the name of Genêt. They had beer up all night clearing for action on account of hearing guns in the fog. Uncle Aurette and Captain Giddens must have been passing the time o' day with each other off Newhaven, and the frigate had drifted past 'em. She never knew she'd run down our smack. Seeing so many aboard was total strangers to each other, I thought one more mightn't be noticed; so I put Aunt Cécile's red cap on the back of my head, and my hands in my pockets like the rest, and, as we French say, I circulated till I found the galley.

““What! Here's one of 'em that isn't sick!” says a cook. “Take his breakfast to Citizen Bompard.”

‘I carried the tray to the cabin, but I didn't call this Bompard “Citizen.” Oh no! “Mon Capitaine” was my little word, same as Uncle Aurette used to answer in King Louis' Navy. Bompard, he liked it; he took me on for cabin servant, and after that no one asked questions; and thus I got good victuals and light work all the way across to America. He talked a heap of politics, and so did his officers, and when this Ambassador Genêt got rid of his land-stomach and laid down the law

after dinner, a rooks' parliament was nothing compared to their cabin. I learned to know most of the men which had worked the French Revolution, through waiting at table and hearing talk about 'em. One of our forecas'le six-pounders was called Danton and t'other Marat. I used to play the fiddle between 'em, sitting on the capstan. Day in and day out Bompard and Monsieur Genêt talked o' what France had done, and how the United States was going to join her to finish off the English in this war. Monsieur Genêt said he'd justabout make the United States fight for France. He was a rude common man. But I liked listening. I always helped drink any healths that was proposed—specially Citizen Danton's who'd cut off King Louis' head. An all-Englishman might have been shocked—that's where my French blood saved me.

' It didn't save me from getting a dose of ship's fever though, the week before we put Monsieur Genêt ashore at Charleston; and what was left of me after bleeding and pills took the dumb horrors from living 'tween decks. The surgeon, Karaguen his name was, kept me down there to help him with his plasters—I was too weak to wait on Bompard. I don't remember much of any account for the next few weeks, till I smelled lilacs, and I looked out of the port, and we was moored to a wharf-edge and there was a town o' fine gardens and red-brick houses and all the green leaves in God's world waiting for me outside.

' "What's this?" I said to the sick-bay man—old Pierre Tiphaigne he was. "Philadelphia." says

Pierre. "You've missed it all. We're sailing next week."

'I just turned round and cried for longing to be amongst the laylocks.

"If that's your trouble," says old Pierre, "you go straight ashore. None 'll hinder you. They're all gone mad on these coasts—French and American together. 'Tisn't *my* notion o' war." Pierre was an old King Louis man.

'My legs was pretty tottly, but I made shift to go on deck, which it was like a fair. The frigate was crowded with fine gentlemen and ladies pouring in and out. They sung and they waved French flags, while Captain Bompard and his officers—yes, and some of the men—speechified to all and sundry about war with England. They shouted, "Down with England!"—"Down with Washington!"—"Hurrah for France and the Republic!". I couldn't make sense of it. I wanted to get out from that crunch of swords and petticoats and sit in a field. One of the gentlemen said to me, "Is that a genuine cap o' Liberty you're wearing?" 'Twas Aunt Cécile's red one, and pretty near wore out. "Oh yes!" I says, "straight from France." "I'll give you a shilling for it," he says, and with that money in my hand and my fiddle under my arm I squeezed past the entry-port and went ashore. It was like a dream—meadows, trees, flowers, birds, houses, and people *all* different! I sat me down in a meadow and fiddled a bit, and then I went in and out the streets, looking and smelling and touching, like a little dog at a fair. Fine folk was setting on the white stone doorsteps of their houses,

and a girl threw me a handful of laylock sprays, and when I said "Merci" without thinking, she said she loved the French. They was all the fashion in the city. I saw more tricolour flags in Philadelphia than ever I'd seen in Boulogne, and every one was shouting for war with England. A crowd o' folk was cheering after our French Ambassador—that same Monsieur Genêt which we'd left at Charleston. He was a-horseback behaving as if the place belonged to him—and commanding all and sundry to fight the British. But I'd heard that before. I got into a long straight street as wide as the Broyle, where gentlemen was racing horses. I'm fond o' horses. Nobody hindered 'em, and a man told me it was called Race Street o' purpose for that. Then I followed some black niggers, which I'd never seen close before; but I left them to run after a great, proud, copper-faced man with feathers in his hair and a red blanket trailing behind him. A man told me he was a real Red Indian called Red Jacket, and I followed him into an alley-way off Race Street by Second Street, where there was a fiddle playing. I'm fond o' fiddling. The Indian stopped at a baker's shop—Conrad Gerhard's it was—and bought some sugary cakes. Hearing what the price was I was going to have some too, but the Indian asked me in English if I was hungry. "Oh yes!" I says. I must have looked a sore scrattel. He opens a door on to a staircase and leads the way up. We walked into a dirty little room full of flutes and fiddles and a fat man fiddling by the window, in a smell of cheese and medicines fit to

knock you down. I *was* knocked down too, for the fat man jumped up and hit me a smack in the face. I fell against an old spinet covered with pill-boxes and the pills rolled about the floor. The Indian never moved an eyelid.

“Pick up the pills! Pick up the pills!” the fat man screeches.

“I started picking ’em up—hundreds of ’em—meaning to run out under the Indian’s arm, but I came on giddy all over and I sat down. The fat man went back to his fiddling.

“Toby!” says the Indian after quite a while. “I brought the boy to be fed, not hit.”

“What?” says Toby, “I thought it was Gert Schwankfelder.” He put down his fiddle and took a good look at me. “Himmel!” he says. “I have hit the wrong boy. It is not the new boy. Why are you not the new boy? Why *are* you not Gert Schwankfelder?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “The gentleman in the pink blanket brought me.”

“Says the Indian, “He is hungry, Toby. Christians always feed the hungry. So I bring him.”

“You should have said that first,” said Toby. He pushed plates at me and the Indian put bread and pork on them, and a glass of Madeira wine. I told him I was off the French ship, which I had joined on account of my mother being French. That was true enough when you think of it, and besides I saw that the French was all the fashion in Philadelphia. Toby and the Indian whispered and I went on picking up the pills.

““ You like pills—eh ? ” says Toby.

““ No,” I says. “ I’ve seen our ship’s doctor roll too many of ’em.”

“ Ho ! ” he says, and he shoves two bottles at me. “ What’s those ? ”

““ Calomel,” I says. “ And t’other’s senna.”

““ Right,” he says. “ One week have I tried to teach Gert Schwankfelder the difference between them, yet he cannot tell. You like to fiddle ? ” he says. He’d just seen my kit on the floor.

““ Oh yes ! ” says I.

““ Oho ! ” he says. “ What note is this ? ” drawing his bow acrost.

‘ He meant it for A, so I told him it was.’

““ My brother,” he says to the Indian. “ I think this is the hand of Providence ! I warned that Gert if he went to play upon the wharves any more he would hear from me. Now look at this boy and say what you think.”

‘ The Indian looked me over whole minutes—there was a musical clock on the wall and dolls came out and hopped while the hour struck. He looked me over all the while they did it.

““ Good,” he says at last. “ This boy is good.”

““ Good, then,” says Toby. “ Now I shall play my fiddle and you shall sing your hymn, brother. Boy, go down to the bakery and tell them you are young Gert Schwankfelder that was. The horses are in Davy Jones’s locker. If you ask any questions you shall hear from me.”

‘ I left ’em singing hymns and I went down to old Conrad Gerhard. He wasn’t at all surprised when I told him I was young Gert Schwankfelder

that was. He knew Toby. His wife she walked me into the back-yard without a word, and she washed me and she cut my hair to the edge of a basin, and she put me to bed, and oh ! how I slept—how I slept in that little room behind the oven looking on the flower garden ! I didn't know Toby went to the *Embussade* that night and bought me off Dr. Karaguen for twelve dollars and a dozen bottles of Seneca Oil. Karaguen wanted a new lace to his coat, and he reckoned I hadn't long to live ; so he put me down as "discharged sick."

'I like Toby,' said Una.

'Who was he?' said Puck.

'Apothecary Tobias Hirte,' Pharaoh replied. 'One Hundred and Eighteen, Second Street—the famous Seneca Oil man, that lived half of every year among the Indians. But let me tell my tale my own way, same as his brown mare used to go to Lebanon.'

'Then why did he keep her in Davy Jones's locker?' Dan asked.

'That was his joke. He kept her under David Jones's hat shop in the "Buck" tavern yard, and his Indian friends kept their ponies there when they visited him. I looked after the horses when I wasn't rolling pills on top of the old spinet, while he played his fiddle and Red Jacket sang hymns. I liked it. I had good victuals, light work, a suit o' clean clothes, a plenty music, and quiet, smiling German folk all around that let me sit in their gardens. My first Sunday, Toby took me to his church in Moravian

Alley; and that was in a garden too. The women wore long-eared caps and handkerchiefs. They came in at one door and the men at another, and there was a brass chandeller you could see your face in, and a nigger-boy to blow the organ bellows. I carried Toby's fiddle, and he played pretty much as he chose all against the organ and the singing. He was the only one they let do it, for they was a simple-minded folk. They used to wash each other's feet up in the attic to keep 'emself humble: which Lord knows they didn't need.'

'How very queer,' said Una.

Pharaoh's eyes twinkled. 'I've met many and seen much,' he said; 'but I haven't yet found any better or quieter or forbearinger people than the Brethren and Sestern of the Moravian Church in Philadelphia. Nor will I ever forget my first Sunday—the service was in English that week—with the smell of the flowers coming in from Pastor Meder's garden where the big peach tree is, and me looking at all the clean strangeness and thinking of 'tween decks on the *Embuscade* only six days ago. Being a boy, it seemed to me it had lasted for ever, and was going on for ever. But I didn't know Toby then. As soon as the dancing clock struck midnight that Sunday—I was lying under the spinet—I heard Toby's fiddle. He'd just done his supper, which he always took late and heavy. "Gert," says he, "get the horses. Liberty and Independence for ever! The flowers appear upon the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come. We are going to my country seat in Lebanon."

‘I rubbed my eyes, and fetched ’em out of the “Buck” stable. Red Jacket was there saddling his, and when I’d packed the saddle-bags we three rode up Race Street to the Ferry by starlight. So we went travelling. It’s a kindly, softly country there, back of Philadelphia among the German towns, Lancaster way. Little houses and bursting big barns, fat cattle, fat women, and all as peaceful as Heaven might be if they farmed there. Toby sold medicines out of his saddle-bags, and gave the French war-news to folk along the roads. Him and his long-hilted umberell was as well known as the stage coaches. He took orders for that famous Seneca Oil which he had the secret of from Red Jacket’s Indians, and he slept in friends’ farmhouses, but he *would* shut all the windows; so Red Jacket and me slept outside. There’s nothing to hurt except snakes—and they slip away quick enough if you thrash in the bushes.’

‘I’d have liked that!’ said Dan.

‘I’d no fault to find with those days. In the cool o’ the morning the cat-bird sings. He’s something to listen to. And there’s a smell of wild grape-vine growing in damp hollows which you drop into, after long rides in the heat, which is beyond compare for sweetness. So’s the puffs out of the pine woods of afternoons. Come sundown, the frogs strike up, and later on the fireflies dance in the corn. Oh me, the fireflies in the corn! We were a week or ten days on the road, tacking from one place to another—such as Lancaster, Bethlehem-Ephrata—“thou Bethlehem-

Ephrata"—no odds—I loved the going about ; and so we jogged into dozy little Lebanon by the Blue Mountains, where Toby had a cottage and a garden of all fruits. He come north every year for this wonderful Seneca Oil the Seneca Indians made for him. They'd never sell to any one else, and he doctored 'em with von Swieten pills, which they valued more than their own oil. He could do what he chose with them, and, of course, he tried to make them Moravians. The Senecas are a seemly, quiet people, and they'd had trouble enough from white men—Americans and English—during the wars, to keep 'em in that walk. They lived on a Reservation by themselves away off by their lake. Toby took me up there, and they treated me as if I was their own blood brother. Red Jacket said the mark of my bare feet in the dust was just like an Indian's and my style of walking was similar. I know I took to their ways all over.'

'Maybe the gipsy drop in your blood helped you ?' said Puck.

'Sometimes I think it did,' Pharaoh went on. 'Anyhow Red Jacket and Cornplanter, the other Seneca chief, they let me be adopted into the tribe. It's only a compliment, of course, but Toby was angry when I showed up with my face painted. They gave me a side-name which means "Two Tongues," because, d'ye see, I talked French and English.

'They had their own opinions (*I've* heard 'em) about the French and the English, *and* the Americans. They'd suffered from all of 'em

during the wars, and they only wished to be left alone. But they thought a heap of the President of the United States. Cornplanter had had dealings with him in some French wars out West when General Washington was only a lad. His being President afterwards made no odds to 'em. They always called him Big Hand, for he was a large-fisted man, and he was all of their notion of a white chief. Cornplanter 'ud sweep his blanket round him, and after I'd filled his pipe he'd begin—"In the old days, long ago, when braves were many and blankets were few, Big Hand said——" If Red Jacket agreed to the say-so he'd trickle a little smoke out of the corners of his mouth. If he didn't, he'd blow through his nostrils. Then Cornplanter 'ud stop and Red Jacket 'ud take on. Red Jacket was the better talker of the two. I've laid and listened to 'em for hours. Oh! they knew General Washington well. Cornplanter used to meet him at Epply's—the great dancing place in the city before District Marshal William Nichols bought it. They told me he was always glad to see 'em, and he'd hear 'em out to the end if they had anything on their minds. They had a good deal in those days. I came at it by degrees, after I was adopted into the tribe. The talk up in Lebanon and everywhere else that 'summer was about the French war with England and whether the United States 'ud join in with France or make a peace treaty with England. Toby wanted peace so as he could go about the Reservation buying his oils. But most of the white men wished for war, and

they was angry because the President wouldn't give the sign for it. The newspaper said men was burning Guy Fawke images of General Washington and yelling after him in the streets of Philadelphia. You'd have been astonished what those two fine old chiefs knew of the ins and outs of such matters. The little I've learned of politics I picked up from Cornplanter and Red Jacket on the Reservation. Toby used to read the *Aurora* newspaper. He was what they call a "Democrat," though our Church is against the Brethren concerning themselves with politics.'

'I hate politics, too,' said Una, and Pharaoh laughed.

'I might ha' guessed it,' he said. 'But here's something that isn't politics. One hot evening late in August, Toby was reading the newspaper on the stoop and Red Jacket was smoking under a peach tree and I was fiddling. Of a sudden Toby drops his *Aurora*.

"I am an oldish man, too fond of my own comforts," he says. "I will go to the church which is in Philadelphia. My brother, lend me a spare pony. I must be there to-morrow night."

"Good!" says Red Jacket, looking at the sun. "My brother shall be there. I will ride with him and bring back the ponies."

'I went to pack the saddle-bags. Toby had cured me of asking questions. He stopped my fiddling if I did. Besides, Indians don't ask questions much and I wanted to be like 'em.

'When the horses were ready I jumped up.

"Get off," says Toby. "Stay and mind the

cottage till I come back. The Lord has laid this on me, not on you—I wish He hadn't."

'He powders off down the Lancaster road, and I sat on the door-step wondering after him. When I picked up the paper to wrap his fiddle-strings in, I spelled out a piece about the yellow fever being in Philadelphia so dreadful every one was running away. I was scared, for I was fond of Toby. We never said much to each other, but we fiddled together, and music's as good as talking to them that understand.'

'Did Toby die of yellow fever?' Una asked.

'Not him! There's justice left in the world still. He went down to the City and bled 'em well again in heaps. He sent back word by Red Jacket that, if there was war or he died I was to bring the oils along to the City, but till then I was to go on working in the garden and Red Jacket was to see me do it. Down at heart all Indians reckon digging a squaw's business, and neither him nor Cornplanter, when he relieved watch, was a hard task-master. We hired a nigger-boy to do our work, and a lazy grinning runagate he was. When I found Toby didn't die the minute he reached town, why, boylike, I took him off my mind and went with my Indians again. Oh! those days up north at Canasedago, running races and gambling with the Senecas, or bee-hunting in the woods, or fishing in the lake.' Pharaoh sighed and looked across the water. 'But it's best,' he went on suddenly, 'after the first frostes. You roll out o' your blanket and find every leaf left green over night turned red and

yellow, not by trees at a time, but hundreds and hundreds of miles of 'em, like sunsets splattered upside down. On one of such days—the maples was flaming scarlet and gold, and the sumach bushes were redder—Cornplanter and Red Jacket came out in full war-dress, making the very leaves look silly: feathered war-bonnets, yellow doe-skin leggings, fringed and tasselled, red horse-blankets, and their bridles feathered and shelled and beaded no bounds. I thought it was war against the British till I saw their faces weren't painted, and they only carried wrist-whips. Then I hummed "Yankee Doodle" at 'em. They told me they was going to visit Big Hand and find out for sure whether he meant to join the French in fighting the English or make a peace treaty with England. I reckon those two would ha' gone out on the war-path at a nod from Big Hand, but they knew well, if there was war 'twixt England and the United States, their tribe 'ud catch it from both parties same as in all the other wars. They asked me to come along and hold the ponies. That puzzled me, because they always put their ponies up at the "Buck" or Epply's when they went to see General Washington in the city, and horse-holding is a nigger's job. Besides, I wasn't exactly dressed for it.

'D'you mean you were dressed like an Indian?' Dan demanded.

Pharaoh looked a little abashed. 'This didn't happen at Lebanon,' he said, 'but a bit farther north, on the Reservation; and at that particular moment of time, so far as blanket, hair-band,

moccasins, and sunburn went, there wasn't much odds 'twix' me and a young Seneca buck. You may laugh'—he smoothed down his long-skirted brown coat—'but I told you I took to their ways all over. I said nothing, though I was bursting to let out the war-whoop like the young men had taught me.'

'No, and you don't let out one here, either,' said Puck before Dan could ask. 'Go on, Brother Square-toes.'

'We went on.' Pharaoh's narrow dark eyes gleamed and danced. 'We went on—forty, fifty miles a day, for days on end—we three braves. And how a great tall Indian a-horseback can carry his war-bonnet at a canter through thick timber without brushing a feather beats *me*! My silly head was banged often enough by low branches, but they slipped through like running'elks. We had evening hymn-singing every night after they'd blown their pipe-smoke to the quarters of heaven. Where did we go? I'll tell you, but don't blame me if you're no wiser. We took the old war-trail from the end of the Lake along the East Susquehanna through the Nantego country, right down to Fort Shamokin on the Senachse river. We crossed the Juniata by Fort Granville, got into Shippensburg over the hills by the Ochwick trail, and then to Williams Ferry (it's a bad one). From Williams Ferry, across the Shanedore, over the Blue Mountains, through Ashby's Gap, and so south-east by south from there, till we found the President at the back of his own plantations. I'd hate to be trailed by Indians in earnest. They

caught him like a partridge on a stump. After we'd left our ponies, we scouted forward through a woody piece, and, creeping slower and slower, at last if my moccasins even slipped Red Jacket 'ud turn and frown. I heard voices—Monsieur Genêt's for choice—long before I saw anything, and we pulled up at the edge of a clearing where some niggers in grey and red liveries were holding horses, and half-a-dozen gentlemen—but one was Genêt—were talking among felled timber. I fancy they'd come to see Genêt a piece on his road, for his portmantle was with him. I hid in between two logs as near to the company as I be to that old windlass there. I didn't need anybody to show me Big Hand. He stood up, very still, his legs a little apart, listening to Genêt, that French Ambassador, which never had more manners than a Bosham tinker. Genêt was as good as ordering him to declare war on England at once. I had heard that clack before on the *Embascade*. He said he'd stir up the whole United States to have war with England, whether Big Hand liked it or not.

'Big Hand heard him out to the last end. I looked behind me and my two chiefs had vanished like smoke. Says Big Hand, "That is very forcibly put, Monsieur Genêt——" "Citizen—citizen!" the fellow spits in. "I, at least, am a Republican!" "Citizen Genêt," he says, "you may be sure it will receive my fullest consideration." This seemed to take Citizen Genêt back a piece. He rode off grumbling, and never gave his nigger a penny. No gentleman!

‘The others all assembled round Big Hand then, and, in their way, they said pretty much what Genêt had said. They put it to him, here was France and England at war, in a manner of speaking, right across the United States’ stomach, and paying no regards to any one. The French was searching American ships on pretence they was helping England, but really for to steal the goods. The English was doing the same, only t’other way round, and besides searching, they was pressing American citizens into their navy to help them fight France, on pretence that those Americans was lawful British subjects. His gentlemen put this very clear to Big Hand. It didn’t look to *them*, they said, as though the United States trying to keep out of the fight was any advantage to *her*, because she only caught it from both French and English. They said that nine out of ten good Americans was crazy to fight the English then and there. They wouldn’t say whether that was right or wrong; they only wanted Big Hand to turn it over in his mind. He did—for a while. I saw Red Jacket and Cornplanter watching him from the far side of the clearing, and how they had slipped round there was another mystery. Then Big Hand drew himself up, and he let his gentlemen have it.’

‘Hit ’em?’ Dan asked:

‘No, nor yet was it what you might call swearing. He—he blasted ’em with his natural speech. He asked them half-a-dozen times over whether the United States had enough armed ships for any shape or sort of war with any one. He asked

'em, if they thought she *had* those ships, to *give* him those ships, and they looked on the ground, as if they expected to find 'em *there*. He put it to 'em whether, setting ships aside, their country—I reckon he gave 'em good reasons—whether the United States was ready or able to face a new big war; she having but so few years back wound up one against England, and being all holds full of her own troubles. As I said, the strong way he laid it all before 'em blasted 'em, and when he'd done it was like a still in the woods after a storm. A little man—but they all looked little—pipes up like a young rook in a blowed-down nest, “Nevertheless, General, it seems you will be compelled to fight England.” Quick Big Hand wheels on him, “And is there anything in my past which makes you think I am averse to fighting Great Britain?” .

‘Everybody laughed except him. “Oh, General, you mistake us entirely!” they says. “I trust so,” he says. “But I know my duty. We *must* have peace with England.”

““At any price?” says the man with the rook’s voice.

““At any price,” says he, word by word. “Our ships will be searched—our citizens will be pressed, but——”

““Then what about the Declaration of Independence?” says one.

““Deal with facts, not fancies,” says Big Hand. “The United States are in no position to fight England.”

““But think of public opinion,” another one

starts up. "The feeling in Philadelphia alone is at fever heat."

'He held up one of his big hands. "Gentlemen," he says—slow he spoke, but his voice carried far—"I have to think of our country. Let me assure you that the treaty with Great Britain will be made though every city in the Union burn me in effigy."

"At any price?" the actor-like chap keeps on croaking.

"The treaty must be made on Great Britain's own terms. What else can I do?"

'He turns his back on 'em and they looked at each other and slinked off to the horses, leaving him alone: and then I saw he was an old man. Then Red Jacket and Cornplanter rode down the clearing from the far end as though they had just chanced along. Back went Big Hand's shoulders, up went his head and he stepped forward one single pace with a great deep Hough! so pleased he was. That was a statelified meeting to behold—three big men, and two of 'em looking like jewelled images among the spattle of gay-coloured leaves. I saw my chiefs' war-bonnets sinking together, down and down. Then they made the sign which no Indian makes outside of the Medicine Lodges—a sweep of the right hand just clear of the dust and an inbend of the left knee at the same time, and those proud eagle feathers almost touched his boot-top.'

'What did it mean?' said Dan.

'Mean!' Pharaoh cried. 'Why, it's what you—what we—it's the Sachems' way of sprinkling

the sacred corn-meal in front of—oh! it's a piece of Indian compliment really, and it signifies that you are a very big chief.

'Big Hand looked down on 'em. First he says quite softly, "My brothers know it is not easy to be a chief." Then his voice grew. "My children," says he, "what is in your minds?"

'Says Cornplanter, "We came to ask whether there will be war with King George's men, but we have heard what our Father has said to his chiefs. We will carry away that talk in our hearts to tell to our people."

"No," says Big Hand. "Leave all that talk behind—it was between white men only—but take this message from *me* to your people—'There will be no war.'"

'His gentlemen were waiting, so they didn't delay him; only Cornplanter says, using his old side-name, "Big Hand, did you see us among the timber just now?"

"Surely," says he. "*You* taught me to look behind trees when we were both young." And with that he cantered off.

'Neither of my chiefs spoke till we were back on our ponies again and a half-hour along the home-trail. Then Cornplanter says to Red Jacket, "We will have the corn-dance this year. There will be no war." And that was all there was to it.'

Pharaoh stood up as though he had finished.

'Yes,' said Puck, rising too. 'And what came out of it in the long run?'

'Let me get at my story my own way,' was the

answer. 'Look ! it's later than I thought. That Shoreham smack's thinking of her supper.'

The children looked across the darkening Channel. A smack had hoisted a lantern and slowly moved west where Brighton pier lights ran out in a twinkling line. When they turned round The Gap was empty behind them.

'I expect they've packed our trunks by now,' said Dan. 'This time to-morrow we'll be home.'

The Man who would be King

Brother to a Prince and fellow to a beggar if he be found
worthy

THE Law, as quoted, lays down a fair conduct of life, and one not easy to follow. I have been fellow to a beggar again and again under circumstances which prevented either of us finding out whether the other was worthy. I have still to be brother to a Prince, though I once came near to kinship with what might have been a veritable King, and was promised the reversion of a Kingdom—army, law-courts, revenue, and policy all complete. But, to-day, I greatly fear that my King is dead, and if I want a crown I must go hunt it for myself.

The beginning of everything was in a railway train upon the road to Mhow from Ajmir. There had been a Deficit in the Budget, which necessitated travelling, not Second-class, which is only half as dear as First-class, but by Intermediate, which is very awful indeed. There are no cushions in the Intermediate class, and the population are either Intermediate, which is Eurasian, or native, which for a long night journey is nasty, or Loafer, which is amusing though intoxicated. Intermediates do

not buy from refreshment-rooms. They carry their food in bundles and pots, and buy sweets from the native sweetmeat-sellers, and drink the road-side water. That is why in the hot weather Intermediates are taken out of the carriages dead, and in all weathers are most properly looked down upon.

My particular Intermediate happened to be empty till I reached Nasirabad, when a big black-browed gentleman in shirt-sleeves entered, and, following the custom of Intermediates, passed the time of day. He was a wanderer and a vagabond like myself, but with an educated taste for whisky. He told tales of things he had seen and done, of out-of-the-way corners of the Empire into which he had penetrated, and of adventures in which he risked his life for a few days' food.

'If India was filled with men like you and me, not knowing more than the crows where they'd get their next day's rations, it isn't seventy millions of revenue the land would be paying—it's seven hundred millions,' said he; and as I looked at his mouth and chin I was disposed to agree with him.

We talked politics—the politics of Loafersdom, that sees things from the underside where the lath and plaster is not smoothed off—and we talked postal arrangements because my friend wanted to send a telegram back from the next station to Ajmir, the turning-off place from the Bombay to the Mhow line as you travel westward. My friend had no money beyond eight annas, which he wanted for dinner, and I had no money at all, owing to the hitch in the Budget before mentioned. Further, I was going into a wilderness where, though I should

resume touch with the Treasury, there were no telegraph offices. I was, therefore, unable to help him in any way.

'We might threaten a Station-master, and make him send a wire on tick,' said my friend, 'but that'd mean inquiries for you and for me, and I've got my hands full these days. Did you say you are travelling back along this line within any days?'

'Within ten,' I said.

'Can't you make it eight?' said he. 'Mine is rather urgent business.'

'I can send your telegram within ten days if that will serve you,' I said.

'I couldn't trust the wire to fetch him now I think of it. It's this way. He leaves Delhi on the 23rd for Bombay. That means he'll be running through Ajmir about the night of the 23rd.'

'But I'm going into the Indian Desert,' I explained.

'Well *and* good,' said he. 'You'll be changing at Marwar Junction to get into Jodhpore territory—you must do that—and he'll be coming through Marwar Junction in the early morning of the 24th by the Bombay Mail. Can you be at Marwar Junction on that time? 'Twon't be inconveniencing you because I know that there's precious few pickings to be got out of these Central India States—even though you pretend to be correspondent of the *Backwoodsman*.'

'Have you ever tried that trick?' I asked.

'Again and again, but the Residents find you out, and then you get escorted to the Border before you've time to get your knife into them. But about

my friend here. I *must* give him a word o' mouth to tell him what's come to me or else he won't know where to go. I would take it more than kind of you if you was to come out of Central India in time to catch him at Marwar Junction, and say to him : "He has gone South for the week." He'll know what that means. He's a big man with a red beard, and a great swell he is. You'll find him sleeping like a gentleman with all his luggage round him in a Second-class compartment. But don't you be afraid. Slip down the window, and say : "He has gone South for the week," and he'll tumble. It's only cutting your time of stay in those parts by two days. I ask you as a stranger—going to the West," he said with emphasis.

'Where have *you* come from?' said I.

'From the East,' said he. 'and I am hoping that you will give him the message on the Square—for the sake of my Mother as well as your own.'

Englishmen are not usually softened by appeals to the memory of their mothers, but for certain reasons, which will be fully apparent, I saw fit to agree.

'It's more than a little matter,' said he, 'and that's why I asked you to do it—and now I know that I can depend on you doing it. A Second-class carriage at Marwar Junction, and a red-haired man asleep in it. You'll be sure to remember. I get out at the next station, and I must hold on there till he comes or sends me what I want.'

'I'll give the message if I catch him,' I said, 'and for the sake of your Mother as well as mine I'll give you a word of advice. Don't try to run the

Central India States just now as the correspondent of the *Backwoodsman*. There's a real one knocking about there, and it might lead to trouble.'

'Thank you,' said he simply, 'and when will the swine be gone? I can't starve because he's ruining my work. I wanted to get hold of the Degumber Rajah down here about his father's widow, and give him a jump.'

'What did he do to his father's widow, then?'

'Filled her up with red pepper and slipped her to death as she hung from a beam. I found that out myself, and I'm the only man that would dare going into the State to get hush-money for it. They'll try to poison me, same as they did in Chortumna when I went on the loot there. But you'll give the man at Marwar Junction my message?'

He got out at a little roadside station, and I reflected. I had heard, more than once, of men personating correspondents of newspapers and bleeding small Native States with threats of exposure, but I had never met any of the caste before. They lead a hard life, and generally die with great suddenness. The Native States have a wholesome horror of English newspapers which may throw light on their peculiar methods of government, and do their best to choke correspondents with champagne, or drive them out of their mind with four-in-hand barouches. They do not understand that nobody cares a straw for the internal administration of Native States so long as oppression and crime are kept within decent limits, and the ruler is not drugged, drunk, or diseased from one end of the

year to the other. They are the dark places of the earth, full of unimaginable cruelty, touching the Railway and the Telegraph on one side, and, on the other, the days of Harun-al-Raschid. When I left the train I did business with divers Kings, and in eight days passed through many changes of life. Sometimes I wore dress-clothes and consorted with Princes and Politicals, drinking from crystal and eating from silver. Sometimes I lay out upon the ground and devoured what I could get, from a plate made of leaves, and drank the running water, and slept under the same rug as my servant. It was all in the day's work.

Then I headed for the Great Indian Desert upon the proper date, as I had promised, and the night Mail set me down at Marwar Junction, where a funny, little, happy-go-lucky, native-managed railway runs to Jodhpore. The Bombay Mail from Delhi makes a short halt at Marwar. She arrived as I got in, and I had just time to hurry to her platform and go down the carriages. There was only one Second-class on the train. I slipped the window and looked down upon a flaming red beard, half covered by a railway rug. That was my man, fast asleep, and I dug him gently in the ribs. He woke with a grunt, and I saw his face in the light of the lamps. It was a great and shining face.

'Tickets again?' said he.

'No,' said I. 'I am to tell you that he is gone South for the week. He has gone South for the week!'

The train had begun to move out. The red man rubbed his eyes. 'He has gone South for

the week,' he repeated. 'Now that's just like his impudence. Did he say that I was to give you anything? 'Cause I won't.'

'He didn't,' I said, and dropped away, and watched the red lights die out in the dark. It was horribly cold because the wind was blowing off the sands. I climbed into my own train—not an Intermediate Carriage this time—and went to sleep.

If the man with the beard had given me a rupee I should have kept it as a memento of a rather curious affair. But the consciousness of having done my duty was my only reward.

Later on I reflected that two gentlemen like my friends could not do any good if they for-gathered and personated correspondents of newspapers, and might, if they black-mailed one of the little rat-trap states of Central India or Southern Rajputana, get themselves into serious difficulties. I therefore took some trouble to describe them as accurately as I could remember to people who would be interested in deporting them; and succeeded, so I was later informed, in having them headed back from the Degumber borders.

Then I became respectable, and returned to an Office where there were no Kings and no incidents outside the daily manufacture of a newspaper. A newspaper office seems to attract every conceivable sort of person, to the prejudice of discipline. Zenana-mission ladies arrive, and beg that the Editor will instantly abandon all his duties to describe a Christian prize-giving in a back-slum of a perfectly inaccessible village; Colonels who

have been overpassed for command sit down and sketch the outline of a series of ten, twelve, or twenty-four leading articles on Seniority *versus* Selection; Missionaries wish to know why they have not been permitted to escape from their regular vehicles of abuse and swear at a brother-missionary under special patronage of the editorial We; stranded theatrical companies troop up to explain that they cannot pay for their advertisements, but on their return from New Zealand or Tahiti will do so with interest; inventors of patent punkah-pulling machines, carriage couplings, and unbreakable swords and axle-trees, call with specifications in their pockets and hours at their disposal; tea-companies enter and elaborate their prospectuses with the office pens; secretaries of ball-committees clamour to have the glories of their last dance more fully described; strange ladies rustle in and say, 'I want a hundred lady's cards printed *at once*, please,' which is manifestly part of an Editor's duty; and every dissolute ruffian that ever tramped the Grand Trunk Road makes it his business to ask for employment as a proof-reader. And, all the time, the telephone-bell is ringing madly, and Kings are being killed on the Continent, and Empires are saying, 'You're another,' and Mister Gladstone is calling down brimstone upon the British Dominions, and the little black copy-boys are whining, '*kaa-pi chay-ha-yeh*' (copy wanted) like tired bees, and most of the paper is as blank as Modred's shield.

But that is the amusing part of the year. There are six other months when no one ever comes

to call, and the thermometer walks inch by inch up to the top of the glass, and the office is darkened to just above reading-light, and the press-machines are red-hot of touch, and nobody writes anything but accounts of amusements in the Hill-stations or obituary notices. Then the telephone becomes a tinkling terror, because it tells you of the sudden deaths of men and women that you knew intimately, and the prickly-heat covers you with a garment, and you sit down and write: 'A slight increase of sickness is reported from the Khuda Janta Khan District. The outbreak is purely sporadic in its nature, and, thanks to the energetic efforts of the District authorities, is now almost at an end. It is, however, with deep regret we record the death, etc.'

Then the sickness really breaks out, and the less recording and reporting the better for the peace of the subscribers. But the Empires and the Kings continue to divert themselves as selfishly as before, and the Foreman thinks that a daily paper really ought to come out once in twenty-four hours, and all the people at the Hill-stations in the middle of their amusements say: 'Good gracious! Why can't the paper be sparkling? I'm sure there's plenty going on up here.'

That is the dark half of the moon, and, as the advertisements say, 'must be experienced to be appreciated.'

It was in that season, and a remarkably evil season, that the paper began running the last issue of the week on Saturday night, which is to say Sunday morning, after the custom of a London

paper. This was a great convenience, for immediately after the paper was put to bed, the dawn would lower the thermometer from 96° to almost 84° for half an hour, and in that chill—you have no idea how cold is 84° on the grass until you begin to pray for it—a very tired man could get off to sleep ere the heat roused him.

One Saturday night it was my pleasant duty to put the paper to bed alone. A King or a courtier or a courtesan or a Community was going to die or get a new Constitution, or do something that was important on the other side of the world, and the paper was to be held open til the latest possible minute in order to catch the telegram.

It was a pitchy black night, as stifling as a June night can be, and the *loo*, the red-hot wind from the westward, was booming among the tinder-dry trees and pretending that the rain was on its heels. Now and again a spot of almost boiling water would fall on the dust with the flop of a frog, but all our weary world knew that was only pretence. It was a shade cooler in the press-room than the office, so I sat there, while the type ticked and clicked, and the night-jars hooted at the windows, and the all but naked compositors wiped the sweat from their foreheads, and called for water. The thing that was keeping us back, whatever it was, would not come off, though the *loo* dropped and the last type was set, and the whole round earth stood still in the choking heat, with its finger on its lip, to wait the event. I drowsed, and wondered whether the telegraph was a blessing, and whether this dying man, or struggling people,

might be aware of the inconvenience the delay was causing. There was no special reason beyond the heat and worry to make tension, but, as the clock-hands crept up to three o'clock, and the machines spun their fly-wheels two or three times to see that all was in order before I said the word that would set them off, I could have shrieked aloud.

Then the roar and rattle of the wheels shivered the quiet into little bits. I rose to go away, but two men in white clothes stood in front of me. The first one said: 'It's him!' The second said: 'So it is!' And they both laughed almost as loudly as the machinery roared, and mopped their foreheads. 'We seed there was a light burning across the road, and we were sleeping in that ditch there for coolness, and I said to my friend here, "The office is open. Let's come along and speak to him as turned us back from the Degumber State,"' said the smaller of the two. He was the man I had met in the Mhow train, and his fellow was the red-bearded man of Marwar Junction. There was no mistaking the eyebrows of the one or the beard of the other.

I was not pleased, because I wished to go to sleep, not to squabble with loafers. 'What do you want?' I asked.

'Half an hour's talk with you, cool and comfortable, in the office,' said the red-bearded man. 'We'd *like* some drink—the Contrack doesn't begin yet, Peachey, so you needn't look—but what we really want is advice. We don't want money. We ask you as a favour, because

we found out you did us a bad turn about De-gumber State.'

I led from the press-room to the stifling office with the maps on the walls, and the red-haired man rubbed his hands. 'That's something like,' said he. 'This was the proper shop to come to. Now, Sir, let me introduce to you Brother Peachey Carnehan, that's him, and Brother Daniel Dravot, that is *me*, and the less said about our professions the better, for we have been most things in our time. Soldier, sailor, compositor, photographer, proof-reader, street-preacher, and correspondents of the *Backwoodsman* when we thought the paper wanted one. Carnehan is sober, and so am I. Look at us first, and see that's sure. It will save you cutting into my talk. We'll take one of your cigars apiece, and you shall see us light up.'

I watched the test. The men were absolutely sober, so I gave them each a tepid whisky and soda.

'Well *and* good,' said Carnehan of the eyebrows, wiping the froth from his moustache. 'Let me talk now, Dan. We have been all over India, mostly on foot. We have been boiler-fitters, engine-drivers, petty contractors, and all that, and we have decided that India isn't big enough for such as us.'

They certainly were too big for the office. Dravot's beard seemed to fill half the room and Carnehan's shoulders the other half, as they sat on the big table. Carnehan continued: 'The country isn't half worked out because they that governs it won't let you touch it. They spend all their

blessed time in governing it, and you can't lift a spade, nor chip a rock, nor look for oil, nor anything like that, without all the Government saying, "Leave it alone, and let us govern." Therefore, such *as* it is, we will let it alone, and go away to some other place where a man isn't crowded and can come to his own. We are not little men, and there is nothing that we are afraid of except Drink, and we have signed a Contrack on that. *Therefore*, we are going away to be Kings.'

'Kings in our own right,' muttered Dravot.

'Yes, of course,' I said. 'You've been tramping in the sun, and it's a very warm night, and hadn't you better sleep over the notion? Come to-morrow.'

'Neither drunk nor sunstruck,' said Dravot. 'We have slept over the notion half a year, and require to see Books and Atlases, and we have decided that there is only one place now in the world that two strong men can Sar-a-*whack*. They call it Kafiristan. By my reckoning it's the top right-hand corner of Afghanistan, not more than three hundred miles from Peshawar. They have two-and-thirty heathen idols there, and we'll be the thirty-third and fourth. It's a mountaineous country, and the women of those parts are very beautiful.'

'But that is provided against in the Contrack,' said Carnehan. 'Neither Woman nor Liqu-or, Daniel.'

'And that's all we know, except that no one has gone there, and they fight, and in any place where they fight a man who knows how to drill

men can always be a King. We shall go to those parts and say to any King we find—"D'you want to vanquish your foes?" and we will show him how to drill men; for that we know better than anything else. Then we will subvert that King and seize his Throne and establish a Dy-nasty.'

'You'll be cut to pieces before you're fifty miles across the Border,' I said. 'You have to travel through Afghanistan to get to that country. It's one mass of mountains and peaks and glaciers, and no Englishman has been through it. The people are utter brutes, and even if you reached them you couldn't do anything.'

'That's more like,' said Carnehan. 'If you could think us a little more mad we would be more pleased. We have come to you to know about this country, to read a book about it, and to be shown maps. We want you to tell us that we are fools and to show us your books.' He turned to the bookcases.

'Are you at all in earnest?' I said.

'A little,' said Dravot sweetly. 'As big a map as you have got, even if it's all blank where Kafiristan is, and any books you've got. We can read, though we aren't very educated.'

I uncased the big thirty-two-miles-to-the-inch map of India, and two smaller Frontier maps, hauled down volume INF-KAN of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and the men consulted them.

'See here!' said Dravot, his thumb on the map. 'Up to Jagdallak, Peachey and me know the road. We was there with Roberts' Army. We'll have to turn off to the right at Jagdallak through

Laghman territory. Then we get among the hills—fourteen thousand feet—fifteen thousand—it will be cold work there, but it don't look very far on the map.'

I handed him Wood on the *Sources of the Oxus*. Carnehan was deep in the *Encyclopædia*.

'They're a mixed lot,' said Dravot reflectively; 'and it won't help us to know the names of their tribes. The more tribes the more they'll fight, and the better for us. From Jagdallak to Ashang H'mm!'

'But all the information about the country is as sketchy and inaccurate as can be,' I protested. 'No one knows anything about it really. Here's the file of the *United Services' Institute*. Read what Bellew says.'

'Blow Bellew!' said Carnehan. 'Dan, they're a stinkin' lot of heathens, but this book here says they think they're related to us English.'

I smoked while the men pored over Raverty, Wood, the maps, and the *Encyclopædia*.

'There is no use your waiting,' said Dravot politely. 'It's about four o'clock now. We'll go before six o'clock if you want to sleep, and we won't steal any of the papers. Don't you sit up. We're two harmless lunatics, and if you come to-morrow evening down to the Serai we'll say good-bye to you.'

'You *are* two fools,' I answered. 'You'll be turned back at the Frontier or cut up the minute you set foot in Afghanistan. Do you want any money or a recommendation down-country? I can help you to the chance of work next week.'

'Next week we shall be hard at work ourselves, thank you,' said Dravot. 'It isn't so easy being a King as it looks. When we've got our Kingdom in going order we'll let you know, and you can come up and help us to govern it.'

'Would two lunatics make a contract like that?' said Carnehan, with subdued pride, showing me a greasy half-sheet of notepaper on which was written the following. I copied it, then and there, as a curiosity—

This Contract between me and you persuing witnesseth in the name of God—Amen and so forth.

(One) That me and you will settle this matter together ; i.e. to be Kings of Kafirstan.

(Two) That you and me will not, while this matter is being settled, look at any Liquor, nor any Woman black, white, or brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful.

(Three) That we conduct ourselves with Dignity and Discretion, and if one of us gets into trouble the other will stay by him.

Signed by you and me this day.

Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan.

Daniel Dravot.

Both Gentlemen at Large.

'There was no need for the last article,' said Carnehan, blushing modestly ; 'but it looks regular. Now you know the sort of men that loafers are—we *are* loafers, Dan, until we get out of India—and *do* you think that we would sign a

Contrack like that unless we was in earnest? We have kept away from the two things that make life worth having.'

'You won't enjoy your lives much longer if you are going to try this idiotic adventure. Don't set the office on fire,' I said, 'and go away before nine o'clock.'

I left them still poring over the maps and making notes on the back of the 'Contrack.' 'Be sure to come down to the Serai to-morrow,' were their parting words.

The Kumharsen Serai is the great four-square sink of humanity where the strings of camels and horses from the North load and unload. All the nationalities of Central Asia may be found there, and most of the folk of India proper. Balkh and Bokhara there meet Bengal and Bombay, and try to draw eye-teeth. You can buy ponies, turquoises, Persian pussy-cats, saddle-bags, fat-tailed sheep and musk in the Kumharsen Serai, and get many strange things for nothing. In the afternoon I went down to see whether my friends intended to keep their word or were lying there drunk.

A priest attired in fragments of ribbons and rags stalked up to me, gravely twisting a child's paper whirligig. Behind him was his servant bending under the load of a crate of mud toys. The two were loading up two camels, and the inhabitants of the Serai watched them with shrieks of laughter.

'The priest is mad,' said a horse-dealer to me. 'He is going up to Kabul to sell toys to the Amir. He will either be raised to honour or have

his head cut off. He came in here this morning and has been behaving madly ever since.'

'The witless are under the protection of God,' stammered a flat-cheeked Uzbeg in broken Hindi. 'They foretell future events.'

'Would they could have foretold that my caravan would have been cut up by the Shinwaris almost within shadow of the Pass!' grunted the Yusufzai agent of a Rajputana trading-house whose goods had been diverted into the hands of other robbers just across the Border, and whose misfortunes were the laughing-stock of the bazar. 'Ohé, priest, whence come you and whither do you go?'

'From Roum have I come,' shouted the priest, waving his whirligig; 'from Roum, blown by the breath of a hundred devils across the sea! O thieves, robbers, liars, the blessing of Pir Khan on pigs, dogs, and perjurers! Who will take the Protected of God to the North to sell charms that are never still to the Amir? The camels shall not gall, the sons shall not fall sick, and the wives shall remain faithful while they are away, of the men who give me place in their caravan. Who will assist me to slipper the King of the Roos with a golden slipper with a silver heel? The protection of Pir Khan be upon his labours!' He spread out the skirts of his gaberdine and pirouetted between the lines of tethered horses.

'There starts a caravan from Peshawar to Kabul in twenty days, *Huzrut*,' said the Yusufzai trader. 'My camels go therewith. Do thou also go and bring us good luck.'

'I will go even now!' shouted the priest. 'I will depart upon my winged camels, and be at Peshawar in a day! Ho! Hazar Mir Khan,' he yelled to his servant, 'drive out the camels, but let me first mount my own.'

He leaped on the back of his beast as it knelt, and, turning round to me, cried: 'Come thou also, Sahib, a little along the road, and I will sell thee a charm—an amulet that shall make thee King of Kafiristan.'

Then the light broke upon me, and I followed the two camels out of the Serai till we reached open road and the priest halted.

'What d'you think o' that?' said he in English. 'Carnehan can't talk their patter, so I've made him my servant. He makes a handsome servant. 'Tisn't for nothing that I've been knocking about the country for fourteen years. Didn't I do that talk neat? We'll hitch on to a caravan at Peshawar till we get to Jagdallak, and then we'll see if we can get donkeys for our camels, and strike into Kafiristan. Whirligigs for the Amir, O Lor! Put your hand under the camel-bags and tell me what you feel.'

I felt the butt of a Martini, and another and another.

'Twenty of 'em,' said Dravot placidly. 'Twenty of 'em and ammunition to correspond, under the whirligigs and the mud dolls.'

'Heaven help you if you are caught with those things!' I said. 'A Martini is worth her weight in silver among the Pathans.'

'Fifteen hundred rupees of capital—every rupee

we could beg, borrow, or steal—are invested on these two camels,’ said Dravot. ‘We won’t get caught. We’re going through the Khyber with a regular caravan. Who’d touch a poor mad priest?’

‘Have you got everything you want?’ I asked, overcome with astonishment.

‘Not yet, but we shall soon. Give us a memento of your kindness, *Brother*. You did me a service, yesterday, and that time in Marwar. Half my Kingdom shall you have, as the saying is.’ I slipped a small charm compass from my watch-chain and handed it up to the priest.

‘Good-bye,’ said Dravot, giving me hand cautiously. ‘It’s the last time we’ll shake hands with an Englishman these many days. Shake hands with him, Carnehan,’ he cried, as the second camel passed me.

Carnehan leaned down and shook hands. Then the camels passed away along the dusty road, and I was left alone to wonder. My eye could detect no failure in the disguises. The scene in the Serai proved that they were complete to the native mind. There was just the chance, therefore, that Carnehan and Dravot would be able to wander through Afghanistan without detection. But, beyond, they would find death—certain and awful death.

Ten days later a native correspondent, giving me the news of the day from Peshawar, wound up his letter with: ‘There has been much laughter here on account of a certain mad priest who is going in his estimation to sell petty gauds and insignificant trinkets which he ascribes as great charms to H.H.

the Amir of Bokhara. He passed through Peshawar and associated himself to the Second Summer caravan that goes to Kabul. The merchants are pleased because through superstition they imagine that such mad fellows bring good fortune.'

The two, then, were beyond the Border. I would have prayed for them, but, that night, a real King died in Europe, and demanded an obituary notice.

The wheel of the world swings through the same phases again and again. Summer passed and winter thereafter, and came and passed again. The daily paper continued and I with it, and upon the third summer there fell a hot night, a night-issue, and a strained waiting for something to be telegraphed from the other side of the world, exactly as had happened before. A few great men had died in the past two years, the machines worked with more clatter, and some of the trees in the office garden were a few feet taller. But that was all the difference.

I passed over to the press-room, and went through just such a scene as I have already described. The nervous tension was stronger than it had been two years before, and I felt the heat more acutely. At three o'clock I cried, 'Print off,' and turned to go, when there crept to my chair what was left of a man. He was bent into a circle, his head was sunk between his shoulders, and he moved his feet one over the other like a bear. I could hardly see whether he walked or crawled—this rag-wrapped, whining cripple who addressed

me by name, crying that he was come back. 'Can you give me a drink?' he whimpered. 'For the Lord's sake give me a drink!'

I went back to the office, the man following with groans of pain, and I turned up the lamp.

'Don't you know me?' he gasped, dropping into a chair, and he turned his drawn face, surmounted by a shock of gray hair, to the light.

I looked at him intently. Once before had I seen eyebrows that met over the nose in an inch-broad black band, but for the life of me I could not tell where.

'I don't know you,' I said, handing him the whisky. 'What can I do for you?'

He took a gulp of the spirit raw, and shivered in spite of the suffocating heat.

'I've come back,' he repeated; 'and I was the King of Kafiristan—me and Dravot,—crowned Kings we was! In this office we settled it—you setting there and giving us the books. I am Peachey—Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan, and you've been setting here ever since—O Lord!'

I was more than a little astonished, and expressed my feelings accordingly.

'It's true,' said Carnehan, with a dry cackle, nursing his feet, which were wrapped in rags. 'True as gospel. Kings we were, with crowns upon our heads—me and Dravot—poor Dan—oh, poor, poor Dan, that would never take advice, not though I begged of him!'

'Take the whisky,' I said, 'and take your own time. Tell me all you can recollect of everything from beginning to end. You got across the Border

on your camels, Dravot dressed as a mad priest and you his servant. Do you remember that?’

‘I ain’t mad—yet, but I shall be that way soon. Of course I remember. Keep looking at me, or maybe my words will go all to pieces. Keep looking at me in my eyes and don’t say anything.’

I leaned forward and looked into his face as steadily as I could. He dropped one hand upon the table and I grasped it by the wrist. It was twisted like a bird’s claw, and upon the back was a ragged red diamond-shaped scar.

‘No, don’t look there. Look at *me*,’ said Carnehan. ‘That comes afterwards, but for the Lord’s sake don’t distrack me. We left with that caravan, me and Dravot playing all sorts of antics to amuse the people we were with. Dravot used to make us laugh in the evenings when all the people was cooking their dinners—cooking their dinners, and . . . what did they do then? They lit little fires with sparks that went into Dravot’s beard, and we all laughed—fit to die. Little red fires they was, going into Dravot’s big red beard—so funny.’ His eyes left mine and he smiled foolishly.

‘You went as far as Jagdallak with that caravan,’ I said at a venture, ‘after you had lit those fires. To Jagdallak, where you turned off to try to get into Kafiristan.’

‘No, we didn’t neither. What are you talking about? We turned off before Jagdallak, because we heard the roads was good. But they wasn’t good enough for our two camels—mine and Dravot’s. When we left the caravan, Dravot

took off all his clothes and mine too, and said we would be heathen, because the Kafirs didn't allow Mohammedans to talk to them. So we dressed betwixt and between, and such a sight as Daniel Dravot I never saw yet nor expect to see again. He burned half his beard, and slung a sheep-skin over his shoulder, and shaved his head into patterns. He shaved mine, too, and made me wear outrageous things to look like a heathen. That was in a most mountaineous country, and our camels couldn't go along any more because of the mountains. They were tall and black, and coming home I saw them fight like wild goats—there are lots of goats in Kafiristan. And these mountains, they never keep still, no more than the goats. Always fighting they are, and don't let you sleep at night.'

'Take some more whisky,' I said very slowly. 'What did you and Daniel Dravot do when the camels could go no farther because of the rough roads that led into Kafiristan?'

'What did which do? There was a party called Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan that was with Dravot. Shall I tell you about him? He died out there in the cold. Slap from the bridge fell old Peachey, turning and twisting in the air like a penny whirligig that you can sell to the Amir.—No; they was two for three-ha'pence, those whirligigs, or I am much mistaken and woeful sore. . . . And then these camels were no use, and Peachey said to Dravot—"For the Lord's sake let's get out of this before our heads are chopped off," and with that they killed the camels

all among the mountains, not having anything in particular to eat, but first they took off the boxes with the guns and the ammunition, till two men came along driving four mules. Dravot up and dances in front of them, singing—"Sell me four mules." Says the first man—"If you are rich enough to buy, you are rich enough to rob;" but before ever he could put his hand to his knife, Dravot breaks his neck over his knee, and the other party runs away. So Carnehan loaded the mules with the rifles that was taken off the camels, and together we starts forward into those bitter cold mountaineous parts, and never a road broader than the back of your hand.'

He paused for a moment, while I asked him if he could remember the nature of the country through which he had journeyed.

'I am telling you as straight as I can, but my head isn't as good as it might be. They drove nails through it to make me hear better how Dravot died. The country was mountaineous and the mules were most contrary, and the inhabitants was dispersed and solitary. They went up and up, and down and down, and that other party, Carnehan, was imploring of Dravot not to sing and whistle so loud, for fear of bringing down the tremenjús avalanches. But Dravot says that if a King couldn't sing it wasn't worth being King, and whacked the mules over the rump, and never took no heed for ten cold days. We came to a big level valley all among the mountains, and the mules were near dead, so we killed them, not having anything in special for them or us to eat.

We sat upon the boxes, and played odd and even with the cartridges that was jolted out.

‘Then ten men with bows and arrows ran down that valley, chasing twenty men with bows and arrows, and the row was tremenjus. They was fair men—fairer than you or me—with yellow hair and remarkable well built. Says Dravot, unpacking the guns—“This is the beginning of the business. We’ll fight for the ten men,” and with that he fires two rifles at the twenty men, and drops one of them at two hundred yards from the rock where he was sitting. The other men began to run, but Carnehan and Dravot sits on the boxes picking them off at all ranges, up and down the valley. Then we goes up to the ten men that had run across the snow too, and they fires a footy little arrow at us. Dravot he shoots above their heads and they all falls down flat. Then he walks over them and kicks them, and then he lifts them up and shakes hands all round to make them friendly like. He calls them and gives them the boxes to carry, and waves his hand for all the world as though he was King already. They takes the boxes and him across the valley and up the hill into a pine wood on the top, where there was half-a-dozen big stone idols. Dravot he goes to the biggest—a fellow they call Imbra—and lays a rifle and a cartridge at his feet, rubbing his nose respectful with his own nose, patting him on the head, and saluting in front of it. He turns round to the men and nods his head, and says—“That’s all right. I’m in the know too, and all these old jim-jams are

my friends." Then he opens his mouth and points down it, and when the first man brings him food, he says—"No"; and when the second man brings him food he says—"No"; but when one of the old priests and the boss of the village brings him food, he says—"Yes," very haughty, and eats it slow. That was how we came to our first village, without any trouble, just as though we had tumbled from the skies. But we tumbled from one of those damned rope-bridges, you see, and—you couldn't expect a man to laugh much after that?'

'Take some more whisky and go on,' I said. 'That was the first village you came into. How did you get to be King?'

'I wasn't King,' said Carnehan. 'Dravot he was the King, and a handsome man he looked with the gold crown on his head and all. Him and the other party stayed in that village, and every morning Dravot sat by the side of old Imbra, and the people came and worshipped. That was Dravot's order. Then a lot of men came into the valley, and Carnehan and Dravot picks them off with the rifles before they knew where they was, and runs down into the valley and up again the other side and finds another village, same as the first one, and the people all falls down flat on their faces, and Dravot says—"Now what is the trouble between you two villages?" and the people points to a woman, as fair as you or me, that was carried off, and Dravot takes her back to the first village and counts up the dead—eight there was. For each dead man Dravot pours a

little milk on the ground and waves his arms like a whirligig, and "That's all right," says he. Then he and Carnehan takes the big boss of each village by the arm and walks them down into the valley, and shows them how to scratch a line with a spear right down the valley, and gives each a sod of turf from both sides of the line. Then all the people comes down and shouts like the devil and all, and Dravot says — "Go and dig the land, and be fruitful and multiply," which they did, though they didn't understand. Then we asks the names of things in their lingo—bread and water and fire and idols and such, and Dravot leads the priest of each village up to the idol, and says he must sit there and judge the people, and if anything goes wrong he is to be shot.

'Next week they was all turning up the land in the valley as quiet as bees and much prettier, and the priests heard all the complaints and told Dravot in dumb show what it was about. "That's just the beginning," says Dravot. "They think we're Gods." He and Carnehan picks out twenty good men and shows them how to click off a rifle, and form fours, and advance in line, and they was very pleased to do so, and clever to see the hang of it. Then he takes out his pipe and his baccypouch and leaves one at one village, and one at the other, and off we two goes to see what was to be done in the next valley. That was all rock, and there was a little village there, and Carnehan says—"Send 'em to the old valley to plant," and takes 'em there, and gives 'em some land that wasn't took before. They were a poor lot, and we blooded

'em with a kid before letting 'em into the new Kingdom. That was to impress the people, and then they settled down quiet, and Carnehan went back to Dravot, who had got into another valley, all snow and ice and most mountaineous. There was no people there and the Army got afraid, so Dravot shoots one of them, and goes on till he finds some people in a village, and the Army explains that unless the people wants to be killed they had better not shoot their little matchlocks ; for they had matchlocks. We makes friends with the priest, and I stays there alone with two of the Army, teaching the men how to drill, and a thundering big Chief comes across the snow with kettle-drums and horns twanging, because he heard there was a new God kicking about. Carnehan sights for the brown of the men half a mile across the snow and wings one of them. Then he sends a message to the Chief that, unless he wished to be killed, he must come and shake hands with me and leave his arms behind. The Chief comes alone first, and Carnehan shakes hands with him and whirls his arms about, same as Dravot used, and very much surprised that Chief was, and strokes my eyebrows. Then Carnehan goes alone to the Chief, and asks him in dumb show if he had an enemy he hated. "I have," says the Chief. So Carnehan weeds out the pick of his men, and sets the two of the Army to show them drill, and at the end of two weeks the men can manœuvre about as well as Volunteers. So he marches with the Chief to a great big plain on the top of a mountain, and the Chief's men rushes into a village and takes it ;

we three Martinis firing into the brown of the enemy. So we took that village too, and I gives the Chief a rag from my coat and says, "Occupy till I come"; which was scriptural. By way of a reminder, when me and the Army was eighteen hundred yards away, I drops a bullet near him standing on the snow, and all the people falls flat on their faces. Then I sends a letter to Dravot wherever he be by land or by sea.'

At the risk of throwing the creature out of train I interrupted—'How could you write a letter up yonder?'

'The letter?—Oh!—The letter! Keep looking at me between the eyes, please. It was a string-talk letter, that we'd learned the way of it from a blind beggar in the Punjab.'

I remembered that there had once come to the office a blind man with a knotted twig and a piece of string which he wound round the twig according to some cipher of his own. He could, after the lapse of days or weeks, repeat the sentence which he had reeled up. He had reduced the alphabet to eleven primitive sounds, and tried to teach me his method, but I could not understand.

'I sent that letter to Dravot,' said Carnehan; 'and told him to come back because this Kingdom was growing too big for me to handle, and then I struck for the first valley, to see how the priests were working. They called the village we took along with the Chief, Bashkai, and the first village we took, Er-Heb. The priests at Er-Heb was doing all right, but they had a lot of pending cases about land to show me, and some men from

another village had been firing arrows at night. I went out and looked for that village, and fired four rounds at it from a thousand yards. That used all the cartridges I cared to spend, and I waited for Dravot, who had been away two or three months, and I kept my people quiet.

'One morning I heard the devil's own noise of drums and horns, and Dan Dravot marches down the hill with his Army and a tail of hundreds of men, and, which was the most amazing, a great gold crown on his head. "My Gord, Carnehan," says Daniel, "this is a tremenjuss business, and we've got the whole country as far as it's worth having. I am the son of Alexander by Queen Semiramis, and you're my younger brother and a God too! It's the biggest thing we've ever seen. I've been marching and fighting for six weeks with the Army, and every footy little village for fifty miles has come in rejoiceful; and more than that, I've got the key of the whole show, as you'll see, and I've got a crown for you! I told 'em to make two of 'em at a place called Shu, where the gold lies in the rock like suet in mutton. Gold I've seen, and turquoise I've kicked out of the cliffs, and there's garnets in the sands of the river, and here's a chunk of amber that a man brought me. Call up all the priests and, here, take your crown."

'One of the men opens a black hair bag, and I slips the crown on. It was too small and too heavy, but I wore it for the glory. Hammered gold it was—five pound weight, like a hoop of a barrel.

"Peachey," says Dravot, "we don't want to

fight no more. The Craft's the trick, so help me ! " and he brings forward that same Chief that I left at Bashkai — Billy Fish we called him afterwards, because he was so like Billy Fish that drove the big tank-engine at Mach on the Bolan in the old days. " Shake hands with him," says Dravot, and I shook hands and nearly dropped, for Billy Fish gave me the Grip. I said nothing, but tried him with the Fellow Craft Grip. He answers all right, and I tried the Master's Grip, but that was a slip. " A Fellow Craft he is ! " I says to Dan. " Does he know the word ? " — " He does," says Dan, " and all the priests know. It's a miracle ! The Chiefs and the priests can work a Fellow Craft Lodge in a way that's very like ours, and they've cut the marks on the rocks, but they don't know the Third Degree, and they've come to find out. It's Gord's Truth. I've known these long years that the Afghans knew up to the Fellow Craft Degree, but this is a miracle. A God and a Grand-Master of the Craft am I, and a Lodge in the Third Degree I will open, and we'll raise the head priests and the Chiefs of the villages."

" " It's against all the law," I says, " holding a Lodge without warrant from any one ; and you know we never held office in any Lodge."

" " It's a master-stroke o' policy," says Dravot. " It means running the country as easy as a four-wheeled bogie on a down grade. We can't stop to inquire now, or they'll turn against us. I've forty Chiefs at my heel, and passed and raised according to their merit they shall be. Billet these men on the villages, and see that we run up a Lodge of some kind. The temple of Imbra will do for the Lodge-

room. The women must make aprons as you show them. I'll hold a levee of Chiefs to-night and Lodge to-morrow."

'I was fair run off my legs, but I wasn't such a fool as not to see what a pull this Craft business gave us. I showed the priests' families how to make aprons of the degrees, but for Dravot's apron the blue border and marks was made of turquoise lumps on white hide, not cloth. We took a great square stone in the temple for the Master's chair, and little stones for the officers' chairs, and painted the black pavement with white squares, and did what we could to make things regular.

'At the levee which was held that night on the hillside with big bonfires, Dravot gives out that him and me were Gods and sons of Alexander, and Past Grand-Masters in the Craft, and was come to make Kafiristan a country where every man should eat in peace and drink in quiet, and specially obey us. Then the Chiefs come round to shake hands, and they were so hairy and white and fair it was just shaking hands with old friends. We gave them names according as they was like men we had known in India—Billy Fish, Holly Dilworth, Pikky Kergan, that was Bazar-master when I was at Mhow, and so on, and so on.

'*The* most amazing miracles was at Lodge next night. One of the old priests was watching us continuous, and I felt uneasy, for I knew we'd have to fudge the Ritual, and I didn't know what the men knew. The old priest was a stranger come in from beyond the village of Bashkai. The minute Dravot puts on the Master's apron that the girls had made

for him, the priest fetches a whoop and a howl, and tries to overturn the stone that Dravot was sitting on. "It's all up now," I says. "That comes of meddling with the Craft without warrant!" Dravot never winked an eye, not when ten priests took and tilted over the Grand-Master's chair—which was to say the stone of Imbra. The priest begins rubbing the bottom end of it to clear away the black dirt, and presently he shows all the other priests the Master's Mark, same as was on Dravot's apron, cut into the stone. Not even the priests of the temple of Imbra knew it was there. The old chap falls flat on his face at Dravot's feet and kisses 'em. "Luck again," says Dravot, across the Lodge to me; "they say it's the missing Mark that no one could understand the why of. We're more than safe now." Then he bangs the butt of his gun for a gavel and says: "By virtue of the authority vested in me by my own right hand and the help of Peachey, I declare myself Grand-Master of all Freemasonry in Kafiristan in this the Mother Lodge o' the country, and King of Kafiristan equally with Peachey!" At that he puts on his crown and I puts on mine—I was doing Senior Warden—and we opens the Lodge in most ample form. It was a amazing miracle! The priests moved in Lodge through the first two degrees almost without telling, as if the memory was coming back to them. After that, Peachey and Dravot raised such as was worthy—high priests and Chiefs of far-off villages. Billy Fish was the first, and I can tell you we scared the soul out of him. It was not in any way according to Ritual, but it served our turn. We didn't raise more than ten of

the biggest men, because we didn't want to make the Degree common. And they was clamouring to be raised.

"In another six months," says Dravot, "we'll hold another Communication, and see how you are working." Then he asks them about their villages, and learns that they was fighting one against the other, and was sick and tired of it. And when they wasn't doing that they was fighting with the Mohammedans. "You can fight those when they come into our country," says Dravot. "Tell off every tenth man of your tribes for a Frontier guard, and send two hundred at a time to this valley to be drilled. Nobody is going to be shot or speared any more so long as he does well, and I know that you won't cheat me, because you're white people—sons of Alexander—and not like common, black Mohammedans. You are *my* people, and by God," says he, running off into English at the end—"I'll make a damned fine Nation of you, or I'll die in the making!"

"I can't tell all we did for the next six months, because Dravot did a lot I couldn't see the hang of, and he learned their lingo in a way I never could. My work was to help the people plough, and now and again go out with some of the Army and see what the other villages were doing, and make 'em throw rope-bridges across the ravines which cut up the country horrid. Dravot was very kind to me, but when he walked up and down in the pine wood pulling that bloody red beard of his with both fists I knew he was thinking plans I could not advise about, and I just waited for orders.

‘But Dravot never showed me disrespect before the people. They were afraid of me and the Army, but they loved Dan. He was the best of friends with the priests and the Chiefs ; but any one could come across the hills with a complaint, and Dravot would hear him out fair, and call four priests together and say what was to be done. He used to call in Billy Fish from Bashkai, and Pikky Kergan from Shu, and an old Chief we called Kafuzelum—it was like enough to his real name—and hold councils with ’em when there was any fighting to be done in small villages. That was his Council of War, and the four priests of Bashkai, Shu, Khawak, and Madora was his Privy Council. Between the lot of ’em they sent me, with forty men and twenty rifles and sixty men carrying turquoises, into the Ghorband country to buy those hand-made Martini rifles, that come out of the Amir’s workshops at Kabul, from one of the Amir’s Herati regiments that would have sold the very teeth out of their mouths for turquoises.

‘I stayed in Ghorband a month, and gave the Governor there the pick of my baskets for hush-money, and bribed the Colonel of the regiment some more, and, between the two and the tribes-people, we got more than a hundred hand-made Martinis, a hundred good Kohat Jezails that’ll throw to six hundred yards, and forty man-loads of very bad ammunition for the rifles. I came back with what I had, and distributed ’em among the men that the Chiefs sent in to me to drill. Dravot was too busy to attend to those things, but the old Army that we first made helped me,

and we turned out five hundred men that could drill, and two hundred that knew how to hold arms pretty straight. Even those cork-screwed, hand-made guns was a miracle to them. Dravot talked big about powder-shops and factories, walking up and down in the pine wood when the winter was coming on.

"I won't make a Nation," says he. "I'll make an Empire! These men aren't niggers; they're English! Look at their eyes—look at their mouths. Look at the way they stand up. They sit on chairs in their own houses. They're the Lost Tribes, or something like it, and they've grown to be English. I'll take a census in the spring if the priests don't get frightened. There must be a fair two million of 'em in these hills. The villages are full o' little children. Two million people—two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men—and all English! They only want the rifles and a little drilling. Two hundred and fifty thousand men, ready to cut in on Russia's right flank when she tries for India! Peachey, man," he says, chewing his beard in great hunks, "we shall be Emperors—Emperors of the Earth! Rajah Brooke will be a suckling to us. I'll treat with the Viceroy on equal terms. I'll ask him to send me twelve picked English—twelve that I know of—to help us govern a bit. There's Mackray, Sergeant-pensioner at Segowli—many's the good dinner he's given me, and his wife a pair of trousers. There's Donkin, the Warder of Tounghoo Jail; there's hundreds that I could lay my hand on if I was in India. The Viceroy shall do

it for me. I'll send a man through in the spring for those men, and I'll write for a dispensation from the Grand Lodge for what I've done as Grand-Master. That—and all the Sniders that'll be thrown out when the native troops in India take up the Martini. They'll be worn smooth, but they'll do for fighting in these hills. Twelve English, a hundred thousand Sniders run through the Amir's country in dribblets—I'd be content with twenty thousand in one year—and we'd be an Empire. When everything was shipshape, I'd hand over the crown—this crown I'm wearing now—to Queen Victoria on my knees, and she'd say: 'Rise up, Sir Daniel Dravot.' Oh, it's big! It's big, I tell you! But there's so much to be done in every place—Bashkai, Khawak, Shu, and everywhere else."

"What is it?" I says. "There are no more men coming in to be drilled this autumn. Look at those fat, black clouds. They're bringing the snow."

"It isn't that," says Daniel, putting his hand very hard on my shoulder; "and I don't wish to say anything that's against you, for no other living man would have followed me and made me what I am as you have done. You're a first-class Commander-in-Chief, and the people know you; but—it's a big country, and somehow you can't help me, Peachey, in the way I want to be helped."

"Go to your blasted priests, then!" I said, and I was sorry when I made that remark, but it did hurt me sore to find Daniel talking so superior when I'd drilled all the men, and done all he told me.

“Don’t let’s quarrel, Peachey,” says Daniel without cursing. “You’re a King too, and the half of this Kingdom is yours ; but can’t you see, Peachey, we want cleverer men than us now—three or four of ’em, that we can scatter about for our Deputies. It’s a hugeous great State, and I can’t always tell the right thing to do, and I haven’t time for all I want to do, and here’s the winter coming on and all.” He put half his beard into his mouth, all red like the gold of his crown.

“I’m sorry, Daniel,” says I. “I’ve done all I could. I’ve drilled the men and shown the people how to stack their oats better ; and I’ve brought in those tinware rifles from Ghorband—but I know what you’re driving at. I take it Kings always feel oppressed that way.”

“There’s another thing too,” says Dravot, walking up and down. “The winter’s coming and these people won’t be giving much trouble, and if they do we can’t move about. I want a wife.”

“For Gord’s sake leave the women alone !” I says. “We’ve both got all the work we can, though I *am* a fool. Remember the Contrack, and keep clear o’ women.”

“The Contrack only lasted till such time as we was Kings ; and Kings we have been these months past,” says Dravot, weighing his crown in his hand. “You go get a wife too, Peachey—a nice, strappin’, plump girl that’ll keep you warm in the winter. They’re prettier than English girls, and we can take the pick of ’em. Boil ’em once or twice in hot water and they’ll come out like chicken and ham.”

“Don't tempt me!” I says. “I will not have any dealings with a woman not till we are a dam' sight more settled than we are now. I've been doing the work o' two men, and you've been doing the work o' three. Let's lie off a bit, and see if we can get some better tobacco from Afghan country and run in some good liquor; but no women.”

“Who's talking o' *women*?” says Dravot. “I said *wife*—a Queen to breed a King's son for the King. A Queen out of the strongest tribe, that'll make them your blood-brothers, and that'll lie by your side and tell you all the people thinks about you and their own affairs. That's what I want.”

“Do you remember that Bengali woman I kept at Mogul Serai when I was a plate-layer?” says I. “A fat lot o' good she was to me. She taught me the lingo and one or two other things; but what happened? She ran away with the Station-master's servant and half my month's pay. Then she turned up at Dadur Junction in tow of a half-caste, and had the impudence to say I was her husband—all among the drivers in the running-shed too!”

“We've done with that,” says Dravot; “these women are whiter than you or me, and a Queen I will have for the winter months.”

“For the last time o' asking, Dan, do *not*,” I says. “It'll only bring us harm. The Bible says that Kings ain't to waste their strength on women, 'specially when they've got a new raw Kingdom to work over.”

“For the last time of answering I will,” said Dravot, and he went away through the pine-trees looking like a big red devil, the sun being on his crown and beard and all.

‘But getting a wife was not as easy as Dan thought. He put it before the Council, and there was no answer till Billy Fish said that he’d better ask the girls. Dravot damned them all round. “What’s wrong with me?” he shouts, standing by the idol Imbra. “Am I a dog or am I not enough of a man for your wenches? Haven’t I put the shadow of my hand over this country? Who stopped the last Afghan raid?” It was me really, but Dravot was too angry to remember. “Who bought your guns? Who repaired the bridges? Who’s the Grand-Master of the sign cut in the stone?” says he, and he thumped his hand on the block that he used to sit on in Lodge, and at Council, which opened like Lodge always. Billy Fish said nothing and no more did the others. “Keep your hair on, Dan,” said I; “and ask the girls. That’s how it’s done at Home, and these people are quite English.”

“The marriage of the King is a matter of State,” says Dan, in a white-hot rage, for he could feel, I hope, that he was going against his better mind. He walked out of the Council-room, and the others sat still, looking at the ground.

“Billy Fish,” says I to the Chief of Bashkai, “what’s the difficulty here? A straight answer to a true friend.”

“You know,” says Billy Fish. “How should a man tell you who knows everything? How can

daughters of men marry Gods or Devils? It's not proper."

"I remembered something like that in the Bible; but if, after seeing us as long as they had, they still believed we were Gods, it wasn't for me to undeceive them.

" "A God can do anything," says I. "If the King is fond of a girl he'll not let her die."—"She'll have to," said Billy Fish. "There are all sorts of Gods and Devils in these mountains, and now and again a girl marries one of them and isn't seen any more. Besides, you two know the Mark cut in the stone. Only the Gods know that. We thought you were men till you showed the sign of the Master."

"I wished then that we had explained about the loss of the genuine secrets of a Master-Mason at the first go-off; but I said nothing. All that night there was a blowing of horns in a little dark temple half-way down the hill, and I heard a girl crying fit to die. One of the priests told us that she was being prepared to marry the King.

" "I'll have no nonsense of that kind," says Dan. "I don't want to interfere with your customs, but I'll take my own wife."—"The girl's a little bit afraid," says the priest. "She thinks she's going to die, and they are a-heartening of her up down in the temple."

" "Hearten her very tender, then," says Dravot, "or I'll hearten you with the butt of a gun so you'll never want to be heartened again." He licked his lips, did Dan, and stayed up walking about more than half the night, thinking of the wife that he

was going to get in the morning. I wasn't any means comfortable, for I knew that dealings with a woman in foreign parts, though you was a crowned King twenty times over, could not but be risky. I got up very early in the morning while Dravot was asleep, and I saw the priests talking together in whispers, and the Chiefs talking together too, and they looked at me out of the corners of their eyes.

"What is up, Fish?" I says to the Bashkai man, who was wrapped up in his furs and looking splendid to behold.

"I can't rightly say," says he; "but if you can make the King drop all this nonsense about marriage, you'll be doing him and me and yourself a great service."

"That I do believe," says I. "But sure, you know, Billy, as well as me, having fought against and for us, that the King and me are nothing more than two of the finest men that God Almighty ever made. Nothing more, I do assure you."

"That may be," says Billy Fish, "and yet I should be sorry if it was." He sinks his head upon his great fur cloak for a minute and thinks. "King," says he, "be you man or God or Devil, I'll stick by you to-day. I have twenty of my men with me, and they will follow me. We'll go to Bashkai until the storm blows over."

A little snow had fallen in the night, and everything was white except the greasy fat clouds that blew down and down from the north. Dravot came out with his crown on his head, swinging his arms and stamping his feet, and looking more pleased than Punch.

“ “ For the last time, drop it, Dan,” says I in a whisper. “ Billy Fish here says that there will be a row.”

“ “ A row among my people ! ” says Dravot. “ Not much. Peachey, you’re a fool not to get a wife too. Where’s the girl ? ” says he with a voice as loud as the braying of a jackass. “ Call up all the Chiefs and priests, and let the Emperor see if his wife suits him.”

“ There was no need to call any one. They were all there leaning on their guns and spears round the clearing in the centre of the pine wood. A lot of priests went down to the little temple to bring up the girl, and the horns blew fit to wake the dead. Billy Fish saunters round and gets as close to Daniel as he could, and behind him stood his twenty men with matchlocks. Not a man of them under six feet. I was next to Dravot, and behind me was twenty men of the regular Army. Up comes the girl, and a strapping wench she was, covered with silver and turquoises, but white as death, and looking back every minute at the priests.

“ “ She’ll do,” said Dan, looking her over. “ What’s to be afraid of, lass ? Come and kiss me.” He puts his arm round her. She shuts her eyes, gives a bit of a squeak, and down goes her face in the side of Dan’s flaming red beard.

“ “ The slut’s bitten me ! ” says he, clapping his hand to his neck, and, sure enough, his hand was red with blood. Billy Fish and two of his matchlock-men catches hold of Dan by the shoulders and drags him into the Bashkai lot, while the

priests howls in their lingo—"Neither God nor Devil but a man!" I was all taken aback, for a priest cut at me in front, and the Army behind began firing into the Bashkai men.

"God A'mighty!" says Dan. "What is the meaning o' this?"

"Come back! Come away!" says Billy Fish. "Ruin and Mutiny is the matter. We'll break for Bashkai if we can."

"I tried to give some sort of orders to my men—the men o' the regular Army—but it was no use, so I fired into the brown of 'em with an English Martini and drilled three beggars in a line. The valley was full of shouting, howling creatures, and every soul was shrieking, "Not a God nor a Devil but only a man!" The Bashkai troops stuck to Billy Fish all they were worth, but their matchlocks wasn't half as good as the Kabul breech-loaders, and four of them dropped. Dan was bellowing like a bull, for he was very wrathful; and Billy Fish had a hard job to prevent him running out at the crowd.

"We can't stand," says Billy Fish. "Make a run for it down the valley! The whole place is against us." The matchlock-men ran, and we went down the valley in spite of Dravot. He was swearing horrible and crying out he was a King. The priests rolled great stones on us, and the regular Army fired hard, and there wasn't more than six men, not counting Dan, Billy Fish, and me, that came down to the bottom of the valley alive.

"Then they stopped firing and the horns in

the temple blew again. "Come away—for God's sake come away!" says Billy Fish. "They'll send runners out to all the villages before ever we get to Bashkai. I can protect you there, but I can't do anything now."

"My own notion is that Dan began to go mad in his head from that hour. He stared up and down like a stuck pig. Then he was all for walking back alone and killing the priests with his bare hands; which he could have done. "An Emperor am I," says Daniel, "and next year I shall be a Knight of the Queen."

"All right, Dan," says I; "but come along now while there's time."

"It's your fault," says he, "for not looking after your Army better. There was mutiny in the midst, and you didn't know—you damned engine-driving, plate-laying, missionary's-pass-hunting hound!" He sat upon a rock and called me every foul name he could lay tongue to. I was too heart-sick to care, though it was all his foolishness that brought the smash.

"I'm sorry, Dan," says I, "but there's no accounting for natives. This business is our Fifty-Seven. Maybe we'll make something out of it yet, when we've got to Bashkai."

"Let's get to Bashkai, then," says Dan, "and, by God, when I come back here again I'll sweep the valley so there isn't a bug in a blanket left!"

"We walked all that day, and all that night Dan was stumping up and down on the snow, chewing his beard and muttering to himself.

"There's no hope o' getting clear," said Billy

Fish. "The priests will have sent runners to the villages to say that you are only men. Why didn't you stick on as Gods till things was more settled? I'm a dead man," says Billy Fish, and he throws himself down on the snow and begins to pray to his Gods.

'Next morning we was in a cruel bad country—all up and down, no level ground at all, and no food either. The six Bashkai men looked at Billy Fish hungry-ways as if they wanted to ask something, but they said never a word. At noon we came to the top of a flat mountain all covered with snow, and when we climbed up into it, behold, there was an Army in position waiting in the middle!

"The runners have been very quick," says Billy Fish, with a little bit of a laugh. "They are waiting for us."

'Three or four men began to fire from the enemy's side, and a chance shot took Daniel in the calf of the leg. That brought him to his senses. He looks across the snow at the Army, and sees the rifles that we had brought into the country.

"We're done for," says he. "They are Englishmen, these people,—and it's my blasted nonsense that has brought you to this. Get back, Billy Fish, and take your men away; you've done what you could, and now cut for it. Carnehan," says he, "shake hands with me and go along with Billy. Maybe they won't kill you. I'll go and meet 'em alone. It's me that did it. Me, the King!"

"Go!" says I. "Go to Hell, Dan! I'm

with you here. Billy Fish, you clear out, and we two will meet those folk."

"“I'm a Chief," says Billy Fish, quite quiet. "I stay with you. My men can go.""

'The Bashkai fellows didn't wait for a second word, but ran off, and Dan and me and Billy Fish walked across to where the drums were drumming and the horns were horning. It was cold—awful cold. I've got that cold in the back of my head now. There's a lump of it there.'

The punkah-coolies had gone to sleep. Two kerosene lamps were blazing in the office, and the perspiration poured down my face and splashed on the blotter as I leaned forward. Carnehan was shivering, and I feared that his mind might go. I wiped my face, took a fresh grip of the piteously mangled hands, and said: 'What happened after that?'

The momentary shift of my eyes had broken the clear current.

'What was you pleased to say?' whined Carnehan. 'They took them without any sound. Not a little whisper all along the snow, not though the King knocked down the first man that set hand on him—not though old Peachey fired his last cartridge into the brown of 'em. Not a single solitary sound did those swines make. They just closed up tight, and I tell you their furs stunk. There was a man called Billy Fish, a good friend of us all, and they cut his throat, Sir, then and there, like a pig; and the King kicks up the bloody snow and says: "We've had a dashed fine run for our money. What's coming next?" But

Peachey, Peachey Taliaferro, I tell you, Sir, in confidence as betwixt two friends, he lost his head, Sir. No, he didn't neither. The King lost his head, so he did, all along o' one of those cunning rope-bridges. Kindly let me have the paper-cutter, Sir. It tilted this way. They marched him a mile across that snow to a rope-bridge over a ravine with a river at the bottom. You may have seen such. They prodded him behind like an ox. "Damn your eyes!" says the King. "D'you suppose I can't die like a gentleman?" He turns to Peachey—Peachey that was crying like a child. "I've brought you to this, Peachey," says he. "Brought you out of your happy life to be killed in Kafiristan, where you was late Commander-in-Chief of the Emperor's forces. Say you forgive me, Peachey."—"I do," says Peachey. "Fully and freely do I forgive you, Dan."—"Shake hands, Peachey," says he. "I'm going now." Out he goes, looking neither right nor left, and when he was plumb in the middle of those dizzy dancing ropes—"Cut, you beggars," he shouts; and they cut, and old Dan fell, turning round and round and round, twenty thousand miles, for he took half an hour to fall till he struck the water, and I could see his body caught on a rock with the gold crown close beside.

'But do you know what they did to Peachey between two pine-trees? They crucified him, Sir, as Peachey's hands will show. They used wooden pegs for his hands and his feet; and he didn't die. He hung there and screamed, and they took him down next day, and said it was a miracle that he

wasn't dead. They took him down—poor old Peachey that hadn't done them any harm—that hadn't done them any——'

He rocked to and fro and wept bitterly, wiping his eyes with the back of his scarred hands and moaning like a child for some ten minutes.

'They was cruel enough to feed him up in the temple, because they said he was more of a God than old Daniel that was a man. Then they turned him out on the snow, and told him to go home, and Peachey came home in about a year, begging along the roads quite safe; for Daniel Dravot he walked before and said: "Come along, Peachey. It's a big thing we're doing." The mountains they danced at night, and the mountains they tried to fall on Peachey's head, but Dan he held up his hand, and Peachey came along bent double. He never let go of Dan's hand, and he never let go of Dan's head. They gave it to him as a present in the temple, to remind him not to come again, and though the crown was pure gold, and Peachey was starving, never would Peachey sell the same. You knew Dravot, Sir! You knew Right Worshipful Brother Dravot! Look at him now!'

He fumbled in the mass of rags round his bent waist; brought out a black horsehair bag embroidered with silver thread, and shook therefrom on to my table—the dried, withered head of Daniel Dravot! The morning sun that had long been paling the lamps struck the red beard and blind sunken eyes; struck, too, a heavy circlet of gold

studded with raw turquoises, that Carnehan placed tenderly on the battered temples.

'You behold now,' said Carnehan, 'the Emperor in his habit as he lived—the King of Kafiristan with his crown upon his head. Poor old Daniel that was a monarch once!'

I shuddered, for, in spite of defacements manifold, I recognised the head of the man of Marwar Junction. Carnehan rose to go. I attempted to stop him. He was not fit to walk abroad. 'Let me take away the whisky, and give me a little money,' he gasped. 'I was a King once. I'll go to the Deputy Commissioner and ask to set in the Poorhouse till I get my health. No, thank you, I can't wait till you get a carriage for me. I've urgent private affairs—in the south—at Marwar.'

He shambled out of the office and departed in the direction of the Deputy Commissioner's house. That day at noon I had occasion to go down the blinding hot Mall, and I saw a crooked man crawling along the white dust of the roadside, his hat in his hand, quavering dolorously after the fashion of street-singers at Home. There was not a soul in sight, and he was out of all possible ear-shot of the houses. And he sang through his nose, turning his head from right to left :—

'The Son of God goes forth to war,
A kingly crown to gain;
His blood-red banner streams afar!
Who follows in his train?'

I waited to hear no more, but put the poor wretch into my carriage and drove him off to the nearest missionary for eventual transfer to the

Asylum. He repeated the hymn twice while he was with me, whom he did not in the least recognise, and I left him singing it to the missionary.

Two days later I inquired after his welfare of the Superintendent of the Asylum.

‘He was admitted suffering from sunstroke. He died early yesterday morning,’ said the Superintendent. ‘Is it true that he was half an hour bare-headed in the sun at mid-day?’

‘Yes,’ said I, ‘but do you happen to know if he had anything upon him by any chance when he died?’

‘Not to my knowledge,’ said the Superintendent. And there the matter rests.

The Man Who Was

The Earth gave up her dead that tide,
Into our camp he came,
And said his say, and went his way,
And left our hearts aflame.

Keep tally—on the gun-butt score
The vengeance we must take,
When God shall bring full reckoning,
For our dead comrade's sake.

Ballad.

LET it be clearly understood that the Russian is a delightful person till he tucks in his shirt. As an Oriental he is charming. It is only when he insists upon being treated as the most easterly of western peoples instead of the most westerly of easterns that he becomes a racial anomaly extremely difficult to handle. The host never knows which side of his nature is going to turn up next.

Dirkovitch was a Russian—a Russian of the Russians—who appeared to get his bread by serving the Czar as an officer in a Cossack regiment, and corresponding for a Russian newspaper with a name that was never twice alike. He was a handsome young Oriental, fond of wandering through unexplored portions of the earth, and he

arrived in India from nowhere in particular. At least no living man could ascertain whether it was by way of Balkh, Badakshan, Chitral, Baluchistan, or Nepal, or anywhere else. The Indian Government, being in an unusually affable mood, gave orders that he was to be civilly treated and shown everything that was to be seen. So he drifted, talking bad English and worse French, from one city to another, till he foregathered with Her Majesty's White Hussars in the city of Peshawur, which stands at the mouth of that narrow swordcut in the hills that men call the Khyber Pass. He was undoubtedly an officer, and he was decorated after the manner of the Russians with little enamelled crosses, and he could talk, and (though this has nothing to do with his merits) he had been given up as a hopeless task, or cask, by the Black Tyrone, who individually and collectively, with hot whisky and honey, mulled brandy, and mixed spirits of every kind, had striven in all hospitality to make him drunk. And when the Black Tyrone, who are exclusively Irish, fail to disturb the peace of head of a foreigner—that foreigner is certain to be a superior man.

The White Hussars were as conscientious in choosing their wine as in charging the enemy. All that they possessed, including some wondrous brandy, was placed at the absolute disposition of Dirkovitch, and he enjoyed himself hugely—even more than among the Black Tyrones.

But he remained distressingly European through it all. The White Hussars were 'My dear true friends,' 'Fellow-soldiers glorious,' and 'Brothers

inseparable.' He would unburden himself by the hour on the glorious future that awaited the combined arms of England and Russia when their hearts and their territories should run side by side, and the great mission of civilising Asia should begin. That was unsatisfactory, because Asia is not going to be civilised after the methods of the West. There is too much Asia and she is too old. You cannot reform a lady of many lovers, and Asia has been insatiable in her flirtations aforetime. She will never attend Sunday school or learn to vote save with swords for tickets.

Dirkovitch knew this as well as any one else, but it suited him to talk special-correspondently and to make himself as genial as he could. Now and then he volunteered a little, a very little, information about his own sotnia of Cossacks, left apparently to look after themselves somewhere at the back of beyond. He had done rough work in Central Asia, and had seen rather more help-yourself fighting than most men of his years. But he was careful never to betray his superiority, and more than careful to praise on all occasions the appearance, drill, uniform, and organisation of Her Majesty's White Hussars. And indeed they were a regiment to be admired. When Lady Durgan, widow of the late Sir John Durgan, arrived in their station, and after a short time had been proposed to by every single man at mess, she put the public sentiment very neatly when she explained that they were all so nice that unless she could marry them all, including the colonel and some majors already married, she was not going to content herself with

one hussar. Wherefore she wedded a little man in a rifle regiment, being by nature contradictory ; and the White Hussars were going to wear crape on their arms, but compromised by attending the wedding in full force, and lining the aisle with unutterable reproach. She had jilted them all—from Basset-Holmer the senior captain to little Mildred the junior subaltern, who could have given her four thousand a year and a title.

The only persons who did not share the general regard for the White Hussars were a few thousand gentlemen of Jewish extraction who lived across the border, and answered to the name of Pathan. They had once met the regiment officially and for something less than twenty minutes, but the interview, which was complicated with many casualties, had filled them with prejudice. They even called the White Hussars children of the devil and sons of persons whom it would be perfectly impossible to meet in decent society. Yet they were not above making their aversion fill their money-belts. The regiment possessed carbines—beautiful Martini-Henry carbines that would lob a bullet into an enemy's camp at one thousand yards, and were even handier than the long rifle. Therefore they were coveted all along the border, and since demand inevitably breeds supply, they were supplied at the risk of life and limb for exactly their weight in coined silver—seven and one half pounds weight of rupees, or sixteen pounds sterling reckoning the rupee at par. They were stolen at night by snaky-haired thieves who crawled on their stomachs under the nose of the sentries ; they disappeared

mysteriously from locked arm-racks, and in the hot weather, when all the barrack doors and windows were open, they vanished like puffs of their own smoke. The border people desired them for family vendettas and contingencies. But in the long cold nights of the northern Indian winter they were stolen most extensively. The traffic of murder was liveliest among the hills at that season, and prices ruled high. The regimental guards were first doubled and then trebled. A trooper does not much care if he loses a weapon—Government must make it good—but he deeply resents the loss of his sleep. The regiment grew very angry, and one rifle-thief bears the visible marks of their anger upon him to this hour. That incident stopped the burglaries for a time, and the guards were reduced accordingly, and the regiment devoted itself to polo with unexpected results; for it beat by two goals to one that very terrible polo corps the Lushkar Light Horse, though the latter had four ponies apiece for a short hour's fight, as well as a native officer who played like a lambent flame across the ground.

They gave a dinner to celebrate the event. The Lushkar team came, and Dirkovitch came, in the fullest full uniform of a Cossack officer, which is as full as a dressing-gown, and was introduced to the Lushkars, and opened his eyes as he regarded. They were lighter men than the Hussars, and they carried themselves with the swing that is the peculiar right of the Punjab Frontier Force and all Irregular Horse. Like everything else in the Service it has to be learnt, but, unlike many things,

it is never forgotten, and remains on the body till death.

The great beam-roofed mess-room of the White Hussars was a sight to be remembered. All the mess plate was out on the long table—the same table that had served up the bodies of five officers after a forgotten fight long and long ago—the dingy, battered standards faced the door of entrance, clumps of winter-roses lay between the silver candlesticks, and the portraits of eminent officers deceased looked down on their successors from between the heads of sambhur, nilghai, markhor, and, pride of all the mess, two grinning snow-leopards that had cost Basset-Holmer four months' leave that he might have spent in England, instead of on the road to Thibet and the daily risk of his life by ledge, snow-slide, and grassy slope.

The servants in spotless white muslin with the crest of their regiments on the brow of their turbans waited behind their masters, who were clad in the scarlet and gold of the White Hussars, and the cream and silver of the Lushkar Light Horse. Dirkovitch's dull green uniform was the only dark spot at the board, but his big onyx eyes made up for it. He was fraternising effusively with the captain of the Lushkar team, who was wondering how many of Dirkovitch's Cossacks his own dark wiry down-countrymen could account for in a fair charge. But one does not speak of these things openly.

The talk rose higher and higher, and the regimental band played between the courses, as is the

immemorial custom, till all tongues ceased for a moment with the removal of the dinner-slips and the first toast of obligation, when an officer rising said, 'Mr. Vice, the Queen,' and little Mildred from the bottom of the table answered, 'The Queen, God bless her,' and the big spurs clanked as the big men heaved themselves up and drank the Queen upon whose pay they were falsely supposed to settle their mess-bills. That Sacrament of the Mess never grows old, and never ceases to bring a lump into the throat of the listener wherever he be by sea or by land. Dirkovitch rose with his 'brothers glorious,' but he could not understand. No one but an officer can tell what the toast means; and the bulk have more sentiment than comprehension. Immediately after the little silence that follows on the ceremony there entered the native officer who had played for the Lushkar team. He could not, of course, eat with the mess, but he came in at dessert, all six feet of him, with the blue and silver turban atop, and the big black boots below. The mess rose joyously as he thrust forward the hilt of his sabre in token of fealty for the colonel of the White Hussars to touch, and dropped into a vacant chair amid shouts of: '*Rung ho, Hira Singh!*' (which being translated means 'Go in and win'). 'Did I whack you over the knee, old man?' 'Rissaldar Sahib, what the devil made you play that kicking pig of a pony in the last ten minutes?' '*Shabash, Rissaldar Sahib!*' Then the voice of the colonel, 'The health of Rissaldar Hira Singh!'

After the shouting had died away Hira Singh

rose to reply, for he was the cadet of a royal house, the son of a king's son, and knew what was due on these occasions. Thus he spoke in the vernacular :—‘Colonel Sahib and officers of this regiment. Much honour have you done me. This will I remember. We came down from afar to play you. But we were beaten’ (‘No fault of yours, Rissaldar Sahib. Played on our own ground y’ know. Your ponies were cramped from the railway. Don’t apologise!’) ‘Therefore perhaps we will come again if it be so ordained.’ (‘Hear ! Hear ! Hear, indeed ! Bravo ! Hsh !’) ‘Then we will play you afresh’ (‘Happy to meet you.’) ‘till there are left no feet upon our ponies. Thus far for sport.’ He dropped one hand on his sword-hilt and his eye wandered to Dirkovitch lolling back in his chair. ‘But if by the will of God there arises any other game which is not the polo game, then be assured, Colonel Sahib and officers, that we will play it out side by side, though *they*,’ again his eye sought Dirkovitch, ‘though *they*, I say, have fifty ponies to our one horse.’ And with a deep-mouthed *Rung ho !* that sounded like a musket-butt on flagstones, he sat down amid leaping glasses.

Dirkovitch, who had devoted himself steadily to the brandy—the terrible brandy aforementioned—did not understand, nor did the expurgated translations offered to him at all convey the point. Decidedly Hira Singh’s was the speech of the evening, and the clamour might have continued to the dawn had it not been broken by the noise of a shot without that sent every man feeling at his

defenceless left side. Then there was a scuffle and a yell of pain.

'Carbine-stealing again!' said the adjutant, calmly sinking back in his chair. 'This comes of reducing the guards. I hope the sentries have killed him.'

The feet of armed men pounded on the verandah flags, and it was as though something was being dragged.

'Why don't they put him in the cells till the morning?' said the colonel testily. 'See if they've damaged him, sergeant.'

The mess sergeant fled out into the darkness and returned with two troopers and a corporal, all very much perplexed.

'Caught a man stealin' carbines, sir,' said the corporal. 'Leastways 'e was crawlin' towards the barracks, sir, past the main road sentries, an' the sentry 'e sez, sir——'

The limp heap of rags upheld by the three men groaned. Never was seen so destitute and demoralised an Afghan. He was turbanless, shoeless, caked with dirt, and all but dead with rough handling. Hira Singh started slightly at the sound of the man's pain. Dirkovitch took another glass of brandy.

'*What* does the sentry say?' said the colonel.

'Sez 'e speaks English, sir,' said the corporal.

'So you brought him into mess instead of handing him over to the sergeant! If he spoke all the Tongues of the Pentecost you've no business——'

Again the bundle groaned and muttered. Little

Mildred had risen from his place to inspect. He jumped back as though he had been shot.

‘Perhaps it would be better, sir, to send the men away,’ said he to the colonel, for he was a much privileged subaltern. He put his arms round the rag-bound horror as he spoke, and dropped him into a chair. It may not have been explained that the littleness of Mildred lay in his being six feet four and big in proportion. The corporal seeing that an officer was disposed to look after the capture, and that the colonel’s eye was beginning to blaze, promptly removed himself and his men. The mess was left alone with the carbine-thief, who laid his head on the table and wept bitterly, hopelessly, and inconsolably, as little children weep.

Hira Singh leapt to his feet. ‘Colonel Sahib,’ said he, ‘that man is no Afghan, for they weep *Ai! Ai!* Nor is he of Hindustan, for they weep *Oh! Ho!* He weeps after the fashion of the white men, who say *Ow! Ow!*’

‘Now where the dickens did you get that knowledge, Hira Singh?’ said the captain of the Lushkar team.

‘Hear him!’ said Hira Singh simply, pointing at the crumpled figure that wept as though it would never cease.

‘He said, “My God!”’ said little Mildred. ‘I heard him say it’

The colonel and the mess-room looked at the man in silence. It is a horrible thing to hear a man cry. A woman can sob from the top of her palate, or her lips, or anywhere else, but a man

must cry from his diaphragm, and it rends him to pieces.

‘Poor devil!’ said the colonel, coughing tremendously. ‘We ought to send him to hospital. He’s been man-handled.’

Now the adjutant loved his carbines. They were to him as his grandchildren, the men standing in the first place. He grunted rebelliously: ‘I can understand an Afghan stealing, because he’s built that way. But I can’t understand his crying. That makes it worse.’

The brandy must have affected Dirkovitch, for he lay back in his chair and stared at the ceiling. There was nothing special in the ceiling beyond a shadow as of a huge black coffin. Owing to some peculiarity in the construction of the mess-room this shadow was always thrown when the candles were lighted. It never disturbed the digestion of the White Hussars. They were in fact rather proud of it.

‘Is he going to cry all night?’ said the colonel, ‘or are we supposed to sit up with little Mildred’s guest until he feels better?’

The man in the chair threw up his head and stared at the mess. ‘Oh, my God!’ he said, and every soul in the mess rose to his feet. Then the Lushkar captain did a deed for which he ought to have been given the Victoria Cross—distinguished gallantry in a fight against overwhelming curiosity. He picked up his team with his eyes as the hostess picks up the ladies at the opportune moment, and pausing only by the colonel’s chair to say, ‘This isn’t *our* affair, you know, sir,’ led them into the

verandah and the gardens. Hira Singh was the last to go, and he looked at Dirkovitch. But Dirkovitch had departed into a brandy-paradise of his own. His lips moved without sound, and he was studying the coffin on the ceiling.

‘White—white all over,’ said Basset-Holmer, the adjutant. ‘What a pernicious renegade he must be ! I wonder where he came from ?’

The colonel shook the man gently by the arm, and ‘Who are you ?’ said he.

There was no answer. The man stared round the mess-room and smiled in the colonel’s face. Little Mildred, who was always more of a woman than a man till ‘Boot and saddle’ was sounded, repeated the question in a voice that would have drawn confidences from a geyser. The man only smiled. Dirkovitch at the far end of the table slid gently from his chair to the floor. No son of Adam in this present imperfect world can mix the Hussars’ champagne with the Hussars’ brandy by five and eight glasses of each without remembering the pit whence he was digged and descending thither. The band began to play the tune with which the White Hussars from the date of their formation have concluded all their functions. They would sooner be disbanded than abandon that tune ; it is a part of their system. The man straightened himself in his chair and drummed on the table with his fingers.

‘I don’t see why we should entertain lunatics,’ said the colonel. ‘Call a guard and send him off to the cells. We’ll look into the business in the morning. Give him a glass of wine first though.’

Little Mildred filled a sherry-glass with the brandy and thrust it over to the man. He drank, and the tune rose louder, and he straightened himself yet more. Then he put out his long-taloned hands to a piece of plate opposite and fingered it lovingly. There was a mystery connected with that piece of plate, in the shape of a spring which converted what was a seven-branched candlestick, three springs on each side and one in the middle, into a sort of wheel-spoke candelabrum. He found the spring, pressed it, and laughed weakly. He rose from his chair and inspected a picture on the wall, then moved on to another picture, the mess watching him without a word. When he came to the mantelpiece he shook his head and seemed distressed. A piece of plate representing a mounted hussar in full uniform caught his eye. He pointed to it, and then to the mantelpiece with inquiry in his eyes.

‘What is it—Oh, what is it?’ said little Mildred. Then as a mother might speak to a child, ‘That is a horse. Yes, a horse.’

Very slowly came the answer in a thick, passionless guttural—‘Yes, I—have seen. But—where is *the* horse?’

You could have heard the hearts of the mess beating as the men drew back to give the stranger full room in his wanderings. There was no question of calling the guard.

Again he spoke—very slowly, ‘Where is *our* horse?’

There is but one horse in the White Hussars, and his portrait hangs outside the door of the

mess-room. He is the piebald drum-horse, the king of the regimental band, that served the regiment for seven-and-thirty years, and in the end was shot for old age. Half the mess tore the thing down from its place and thrust it into the man's hands. He placed it above the mantelpiece, it clattered on the ledge as his poor hands dropped it, and he staggered towards the bottom of the table, falling into Mildred's chair. Then all the men spoke to one another something after this fashion, 'The drum-horse hasn't hung over the mantelpiece since '67.' 'How does he know?' 'Mildred, go and speak to him again.' 'Colonel, what are you going to do?' 'Oh, dry up, and give the poor devil a chance to pull himself together.' 'It isn't possible anyhow. The man's a lunatic.'

Little Mildred stood at the colonel's side talking in his ear. 'Will you be good enough to take your seats please, gentlemen!' he said, and the mess dropped into the chairs. Only Dirkovitch's seat, next to little Mildred's, was blank, and little Mildred himself had found Hira Singh's place. The wide-eyed mess-sergeant filled the glasses in dead silence. Once more the colonel rose, but his hand shook, and the port spilled on the table as he looked straight at the man in little Mildred's chair and said hoarsely, 'Mr. Vice, the Queen.' There was a little pause, but the man sprung to his feet and answered without hesitation, 'The Queen, God bless her!' and as he emptied the thin glass he snapped the shank between his fingers.

Long and long ago, when the Empress of

India was a young woman and there were no unclean ideals in the land, it was the custom of a few messes to drink the Queen's toast in broken glass, to the vast delight of the mess-contractors. The custom is now dead, because there is nothing to break anything for, except now and again the word of a Government, and that has been broken already.

'That settles it,' said the colonel, with a gasp. 'He's not a sergeant. What in the world is he?'

The entire mess echoed the word, and the volley of questions would have scared any man. It was no wonder that the ragged, filthy invader could only smile and shake his head.

From under the table, calm and smiling, rose Dirkovitch, who had been roused from healthful slumber by feet upon his body. By the side of the man he rose, and the man shrieked and grovelled. It was a horrible sight coming so swiftly upon the pride and glory of the toast that had brought the strayed wits together.

Dirkovitch made no offer to raise him, but little Mildred heaved him up in an instant. It is not good that a gentleman who can answer to the Queen's toast should lie at the feet of a subaltern of Cossacks.

The hasty action tore the wretch's upper clothing nearly to the waist, and his body was seamed with dry black scars. There is only one weapon in the world that cuts in parallel lines, and it is neither the cane nor the cat. Dirkovitch saw the marks, and the pupils of his eyes dilated. Also his face changed. He said something that sounded

like *Shto ve takete*, and the man fawning answered, *Chetyre*.

‘What’s that?’ said everybody together.

‘His number. That is number four, you know.’ Dirkovitch spoke very thickly.

‘What has a Queen’s officer to do with a qualified number?’ said the colonel, and an unpleasant growl ran round the table.

‘How can I tell?’ said the affable Oriental with a sweet smile. ‘He is a—how you have it?—escape—run-a-way, from over there.’ He nodded towards the darkness of the night.

‘Speak to him if he’ll answer you, and speak to him gently,’ said little Mildred, settling the man in a chair. It seemed most improper to all present that Dirkovitch should sip brandy as he talked in purring, spitting Russian to the creature who answered so feebly and with such evident dread. But since Dirkovitch appeared to understand no one said a word. All breathed heavily, leaning forward, in the long gaps of the conversation. The next time that they have no engagements on hand the White Hussars intend to go to St. Petersburg in a body to learn Russian.

‘He does not know how many years ago,’ said Dirkovitch facing the mess, ‘but he says it was very long ago in a war. I think that there was an accident. He says he was of this glorious and distinguished regiment in the war.’

‘The rolls! The rolls! Holmer, get the rolls!’ said little Mildred, and the adjutant dashed off bare-headed to the orderly-room, where the muster-rolls of the regiment were kept. He returned just

in time to hear Dirkovitch conclude, 'Therefore, my dear friends, I am most sorry to say there was an accident which would have been reparable if he had apologised to that our colonel, which he had insulted.'

Then followed another growl which the colonel tried to beat down. The mess was in no mood just then to weigh insults to Russian colonels.

'He does not remember, but I think that there was an accident, and so he was not exchanged among the prisoners, but he was sent to another place—how do you say?—the country. So, he says, he came here. He does not know how he came. Eh? He was at Chepany'—the man caught the word, nodded, and shivered—'at Zhigansk and Irkutsk. I cannot understand how he escaped. He says, too, that he was in the forests for many years, but how many years he has forgotten—that with many things. It was an accident; done because he did not apologise to that our colonel. Ah!'

Instead of echoing Dirkovitch's sigh of regret, it is sad to record that the White Hussars lively exhibited un-Christian delight and other emotions, hardly restrained by their sense of hospitality. Holmer flung the frayed and yellow regimental rolls on the table, and the men flung themselves at these.

'Steady! Fifty-six—fifty-five—fifty-four,' said Holmer. 'Here we are. "Lieutenant Austin Limmason. *Missing*." That was before Sebastopol. What an infernal shame! Insulted one of their colonels, and was quietly shipped off. Thirty years of his life wiped out.'

‘But he never apologised. Said he’d see him damned first,’ chorused the mess.

‘Poor chap! I suppose he never had the chance afterwards. How did he come here?’ said the colonel.

The dingy heap in the chair could give no answer.

‘Do you know who you are?’

It laughed weakly.

‘Do you know that you are Limmason—Lieutenant Limmason of the White Hussars?’

Swiftly as a shot came the answer, in a slightly surprised tone, ‘Yes, I’m Limmason, of course.’ The light died out in his eyes, and the man collapsed, watching every motion of Dirkovitch with terror. A flight from Siberia may fix a few elementary facts in the mind, but it does not seem to lead to continuity of thought. The man could not explain how, like a homing pigeon, he had found his way to his own old mess again. Of what he had suffered or seen he knew nothing. He cringed before Dirkovitch as instinctively as he had pressed the spring of the candlestick, sought the picture of the drum-horse, and answered to the toast of the Queen. The rest was a blank that the dreaded Russian tongue could only in part remove. His head bowed on his breast, and he giggled and cowered alternately.

The devil that lived in the brandy prompted Dirkovitch at this extremely inopportune moment to make a speech. He rose, swaying slightly, gripped the table-edge, while his eyes glowed like opals, and began :

'Fellow-soldiers glorious—true friends and hospitable. It was an accident, and deplorable—most deplorable.' Here he smiled sweetly all round the mess. 'But you will think of this little, little thing. So little, is it not? The Czar! Posh! I slap my fingers—I snap my fingers at him. Do I believe in him? No! But in us Slav who has done nothing, *him* I believe. Seventy—how much—millions peoples that have done nothing—not one thing. Posh! Napoleon was an episode.' He banged a hand on the table. 'Hear you, old peoples, we have done nothing in the world—out here. All our work is to do; and it shall be done, old peoples. Get a-way!' He waved his hand imperiously, and pointed to the man. 'You see him. He is not good to see. He was just one little—oh, so little—accident, that no one remembered. Now he is *That!* So will you be, brother soldiers so brave—so will you be. But you will never come back. You will all go where he is gone, or'—he pointed to the great coffin-shadow on the ceiling, and muttering, 'Seventy millions—get a-way, you old peoples,' fell asleep.

'Sweet, and to the point,' said little Mildred. 'What's the use of getting wroth? Let's make this poor devil comfortable.'

But that was a matter suddenly and swiftly taken from the loving hands of the White Hussars. The lieutenant had returned only to go away again three days later, when the wail of the Dead March, and the tramp of the squadrons, told the wondering Station, who saw no gap in the mess-

table, that an officer of the regiment had resigned his new-found commission.

And Dirkovitch, bland, supple, and always genial, went away too by a night train. Little Mildred and another man saw him off, for he was the guest of the mess, and even had he smitten the colonel with the open hand, the law of that mess allowed no relaxation of hospitality.

‘Good-bye, Dirkovitch, and a pleasant journey,’ said little Mildred.

‘*Au revoir*,’ said the Russian.

‘Indeed! But we thought you were going home?’

‘Yes, but I will come again. My dear friends, is that road shut?’ He pointed to where the North Star burned over the Khyber Pass.

‘By Jove! I forgot. Of course. Happy to meet you, old man, any time you like. Got everything you want? Cheroots, ice, bedding? That’s all right. Well, *au revoir*, Dirkovitch.’

‘Um,’ said the other man, as the tail-lights of the train grew small. ‘Of—all—the—unmitigated——!’

Little Mildred answered nothing, but watched the North Star and hummed a selection from a recent Simla burlesque that had much delighted the White Hussars. It ran—

I’m sorry for Mister Bluebeard,
I’m sorry to cause him pain;
But a terrible spree there’s sure to be
When he comes back again.

‘Bread upon the Waters’

If you remember my improper friend Brugglesmith, you will also bear in mind his friend McPhee, Chief Engineer of the *Breslau*, whose dingey Brugglesmith tried to steal. His apologies for the performances of Brugglesmith may one day be told in their proper place: the tale before us concerns McPhee. He was never a racing engineer, and took special pride in saying as much before the Liverpool men; but he had a thirty-two years' knowledge of machinery and the humours of ships. One side of his face had been wrecked through the bursting of a water-gauge in the days when men knew less than they do now; and his nose rose grandly out of the wreck, like a club in a public riot. There were cuts and lumps on his head, and he would guide your forefinger through his short iron-gray hair and tell you how he had come by his trade-marks. He owned all sorts of certificates of extra-competency, and at the bottom of his cabin chest of drawers, where he kept the photograph of his wife, were two or three Royal Humane Society medals for saving lives at sea. Professionally—it was different

when crazy steerage-passengers jumped overboard—professionally, McPhee does not approve of saving life at sea, and he has often told me that a new hell is awaiting stokers and trimmers who sign for a strong man’s pay and fall sick the second day out. He believes in throwing boots at fourth and fifth engineers when they wake him up at night with word that a bearing is red-hot, all because a lamp’s glare is reflected red from the twirling metal. He believes that there are only two poets in the world: one being Robert Burns of course, and the other Gerald Massey. When he has time for novels he reads Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade—chiefly the latter—and knows whole pages of *Hard Cash* by heart. In the saloon his table is next to the captain’s, and he drinks only water while his engines work.

He was good to me when we first met, because I did not ask questions, and believed in Charles Reade as a most shamefully neglected author. Later he approved of my writings to the extent of one pamphlet of twenty-four pages that I wrote for Holdock, Steiner, and Chase, owners of the line, when they bought some ventilating patent and fitted it to the cabins of the *Breslau*, *Spandau*, and *Koltzau*. The purser of the *Breslau* recommended me to Holdock’s secretary for the job; and Holdock, who is a Wesleyan Methodist, invited me to his house, and gave me dinner with the governess when the others had finished, and placed the plans and specifications in my hand, and I wrote the pamphlet that same afternoon. It was called ‘Comfort in the Cabin,’ and brought

me seven pound ten, cash down—an important sum of money in those days; and the governess, who was teaching Master John Holdock his scales, told me that Mrs. Holdock had told her to keep an eye on me, in case I went away with coats from the hat-rack. McPhee liked that pamphlet enormously, for it was composed in the Bouverie-Byzantine style, with baroque and rococo embellishments; and afterward he introduced me to Mrs. McPhee, who succeeded Dinah in my heart; for Dinah was half a world away, and it is wholesome and antiseptic to love such a woman as Janet McPhee. They lived in a little twelve-pound house, close to the shipping. When McPhee was away Mrs. McPhee read the Lloyd's column in the papers, and called on the wives of senior engineers of equal social standing. Once or twice, too, Mrs. Holdock visited Mrs. McPhee in a brougham with celluloid fittings, and I have reason to believe that, after she had played owner's wife long enough, they talked scandal. The Holdocks lived in an old-fashioned house with a big brick garden not a mile from the McPhees, for they stayed by their money as their money stayed by them; and in summer you met their brougham solemnly junketing by Theydon Bois or Loughton. But I was Mrs. McPhee's friend, for she allowed me to convoy her westward, sometimes, to theatres, where she sobbed or laughed or shivered with a simple heart; and she introduced me to a new world of doctors' wives, captains' wives, and engineers' wives, whose whole talk and thought centred in and about ships and lines of ships you

have never heard of. There were sailing-ships, with stewards and mahogany and maple saloons, trading to Australia, taking cargoes of consumptives and hopeless drunkards for whom a sea-voyage was recommended; there were frouzy little West African boats, full of rats and cockroaches, where men died anywhere but in their bunks; there were Brazilian boats whose cabins could be hired for merchandise that went out loaded nearly awash; there were Zanzibar and Mauritius steamers, and wonderful reconstructed boats that plied to the other side of Borneo. These were loved and known, for they earned our bread and a little butter, and we despised the big Atlantic boats, and made fun of the P. & O. and Orient liners, and swore by our respected owners—Wesleyan, Baptist or Presbyterian, as the case might be.

I had only just come back to England when Mrs. McPhee invited me to dinner at three o'clock in the afternoon, and the notepaper was almost bridal in its scented creaminess. When I reached the house I saw that there were new curtains in the window that must have cost forty-five shillings a pair; and as Mrs. McPhee drew me into the little marble-paper hall, she looked at me keenly, and cried:

‘Have ye not heard? What d’ye think o’ the hat-rack?’

Now, that hat-rack was oak—thirty shillings at least. McPhee came downstairs with a sober foot—he steps as lightly as a cat, for all his weight, when he is at sea—and shook hands in a new and awful manner—a parody of old Holdock’s style when he says good-bye to his skippers. I perceived

at once that a legacy had come to him, but I held my peace, though Mrs. McPhee begged me every thirty seconds to eat a great deal and say nothing. It was rather a mad sort of meal, because McPhee and his wife took hold of hands like little children (they always do after voyages), and nodded and winked and choked and gurgled, and hardly ate a mouthful.

A female servant came in and waited; though Mrs. McPhee had told me time and again that she would thank no one to do her housework while she had her health. But this was a servant with a cap, and I saw Mrs. McPhee swell and swell under her *garance*-coloured gown. There is no small free-board to Janet McPhee, nor is *garance* any subdued tint; and with all this unexplained pride and glory in the air I felt like watching fireworks without knowing the festival. When the maid had removed the cloth she brought a pineapple that would have cost half a guinea at that season (only McPhee has his own way of getting such things), and a Canton china bowl of dried lichis, and a glass plate of preserved ginger, and a small jar of sacred and imperial chow-chow that perfumed the room. McPhee gets it from a Dutchman in Java, and I think he doctors it with liqueurs. But the crown of the feast was some Madeira of the kind you can only come by if you know the wine and the man. A little maize-wrapped fig of clotted Madeira cigars went with the wine, and the rest was a pale-blue smoky silence; Janet, in her splendour, smiling on us two, and patting McPhee's hand.

‘We’ll drink,’ said McPhee slowly, rubbing his chin, ‘to the eternal damnation o’ Holdock, Steiner, and Chase.’

Of course I answered ‘Amen,’ though I had made seven pound ten shillings out of the firm. McPhee’s enemies were mine, and I was drinking his Madeira.

‘Ye’ve heard nothing?’ said Janet. ‘Not a word, not a whisper?’

‘Not a word, nor a whisper. On my word, I have not.’

‘Tell him, Mac,’ said she; and that is another proof of Janet’s goodness and wifely love. A smaller woman would have babbled first, but Janet is five feet nine in her stockings.

‘We’re rich,’ said McPhee. I shook hands all round.

‘We’re damned rich,’ he added. I shook hands all round a second time.

‘I’ll go to sea no more—unless—there’s no sayin’—a private yacht, maybe—wi’ a small an’ handy auxiliary.’

‘It’s not enough for *that*,’ said Janet. ‘We’re fair rich—well-to-do, but no more. A new gown for church, and one for the theatre. We’ll have it made west.’

‘How much is it?’ I asked.

‘Twenty-five thousand pounds.’ I drew a long breath. ‘An’ I’ve been earnin’ twenty-five an’ twenty pound a month!’ The last words came away with a roar, as though the wide world was conspiring to beat him down.

‘All this time I’m waiting,’ I said. ‘I know

nothing since last September. Was it left you?'

They laughed aloud together. 'It was left,' said McPhee, choking. 'Ou, ay, it was left. That's vara good. Of course it was left. Janet, d'ye note that? It was left. Now if you'd put *that* in your pamphlet it would have been vara jocose. It *was* left.' He slapped his thigh and roared till the wine quivered in the decanter.

The Scotch are a great people, but they are apt to hang over a joke too long, particularly when no one can see the point but themselves.

'When I rewrite my pamphlet I'll put it in, McPhee. Only I must know something more first.'

McPhee thought for the length of half a cigar, while Janet caught my eye and led it round the room to one new thing after another—the new vine-pattern carpet, the new chiming rustic clock between the models of the Colombo outrigger-boats, the new inlaid sideboard with a purple cut-glass flower-stand, the fender of gilt and brass, and last, the new black-and-gold piano.

'In October o' last year the Board sacked me,' began McPhee. 'In October o' last year the *Breslau* came in for winter overhaul. She'd been runnin' eight months—two hunder an' forty days—an' I was three days makin' up my indents, when she went to dry-dock. All told, mark you, it was this side o' three hunder pound—to be preceese, two hunder an' eighty-six pound four shillings. There's not another man could ha' nursed the *Breslau* for eight months to that tune. Never

again—never again! They may send their boats to the bottom, for aught I care.’

‘There’s no need,’ said Janet softly. ‘We’re done wi’ Holdock, Steiner, and Chase.’

‘It’s irritatin’, Janet, it’s just irritatin’. I ha’ been justified from first to last, as the world knows, but—but I canna’ forgie ’em. Ay, wisdom is justified o’ her children; an’ any other man than me wad ha’ made the indent eight hunder. Hay was our skipper—ye’ll have met him. They shifted him to the *Torgau*, an’ bade me wait for the *Breslau* under young Bannister. Ye’ll obsairve there’d been a new election on the Board. I heard the shares were sellin’ hither an’ yon, an’ the major part of the Board was new to me. The old Board would ne’er ha’ done it. They trusted me. But the new Board was all for reorganisation. Young Steiner—Steiner’s son—the Jew, was at the bottom of it, an’ they did not think it worth their while to send me word. The first I knew—an’ I was Chief Engineer—was the notice of the Line’s winter sailin’s, and the *Breslau* timed for sixteen days between port an’ port! Sixteen days, man! She’s a good boat, but eighteen is her summer time, mark you. Sixteen was sheer flytin’, kitin’ nonsense, an’ so I told young Bannister.

“We’ve got to make it,” he said. “Ye should not ha’ sent in a three hunder pound indent.”

“Do they look for their boats to be run on air?” I said. “The Board is daft.”

“E’en tell ’em so,” he says. “I’m a married man, an’ my fourth’s on the ways now, she says.”

'A boy—wi' red hair,' Janet put in. Her own hair is the splendid red-gold that goes with a creamy complexion.

'My word, I was an angry man that day! Forbye I was fond o' the old *Breslau*, I look for a little consideration from the Board after twenty years' service. There was Board meetin' on Wednesday; an' I sat overnight in the engine-room, takin' figures to support my case. Well, I put it fair and square before them all. "Gentlemen," I said, "I've run the *Breslau* eight seasons, an' I believe there's no fault to find wi' my wark. But if ye haud to this"—I waggled the advertisement at 'em—"this that *I*'ve never heard of till I read it at breakfast, I do assure you on my professional reputation, she can never do it. That is to say, she can for a while, but at a risk no thinkin' man would run."

"What the deil d'ye suppose we pass your indent for?" says old Holdock. "Man, we're spendin' money like watter."

"I'll leave it in the Board's hands," I said, "if two hunder an' eighty-seven pound is anything beyond right and reason for eight months." I might ha' saved my breath, for the Board was new since the last election, an' there they sat, the damned deevidend-huntin' ship-chandlers, deaf as the adders o' Scripture.

"We must keep faith wi' the public," said young Steiner.

"Keep faith wi' the *Breslau* then," I said. "She's served you well, an' your father before you. She'll need her bottom restiffenin', an' new bed-plates, an' turnin' out the forward boilers, an'

re-borin' all three cylinders, an' refacin' all guides, to begin with. It's a three months' job."

" "Because one employé is afraid?" says young Steiner. "Maybe a piano in the Chief Engineer's cabin would be more to the point."

"I crushed my cap in my hands, an' thanked God we'd no bairns an' a bit put by.

" "Understand, gentlemen," I said. "If the *Breslau* is made a sixteen-day boat, ye'll find another engineer."

" "Bannister makes no objection," said Holdock.

" "I'm speakin' for myself," I said. "Bannister has bairns." An' then I lost my temper. "Ye can run her into Hell an' out again if ye pay pilotage," I said, "but ye run without me."

" "That's insolence," said young Steiner.

" "At your pleasure," I said, turnin' to go.

" "Ye can consider yourself dismissed. We must preserve discipline among our employés," said old Holdock, an' he looked round to see that the Board was with him. They knew nothin'—God forgie 'em—an' they nodded me out o' the Line after twenty years—after twenty years.

"I went out an' sat down by the hall porter to get my wits again. I'm thinkin' I swore at the Board. Then auld McRimmon—o' McNaughton and McRimmon—came oot o' his office, that's on the same floor, an' looked at me, proppin' up one eyelid wi' his forefinger. Ye know they call him the Blind Deevil, forbye he's onythin' but blind, an' no deevil in his dealin's wi' me—McRimmon o' the Black Bird Line.

" "What's here, Mister McPhee?" said he.

'I was past prayin' for by then. "A Chief Engineer sacked after twenty years' service because he'll not risk the *Breslau* on the new timin', an' be damned to ye, McRimmon," I said.

'The auld man sucked in his lips an' whistled. "Ah," said he, "the new timin'. I see!" He doddered into the Board-room I'd just left, an' the Dandie-dog that is just his blind man's leader stayed wi' me. *That* was providential. In a minute he was back again. "Ye've cast your bread on the watter, M'Phee, an' be damned to you," he says. "Whaur's my dog? My word, is he on your knee? There's more discernment in a dog than a Jew. What garred ye curse your Board, McPhee? It's expensive."

"They'll pay more for the *Breslau*," I said. "Get off my knee, ye smotherin' beastie."

"Bearin's hot, eh?" said McRimmon. "It's thirty year since a man daur curse me to my face. Time was I'd ha' cast ye doon the stairway for that."

"Forgie's all!" I said. He was wearin' to eighty, as I knew. "I was wrong, McRimmon; but when a man's shown the door for doin' his plain duty he's not always ceevil."

"So I hear," says McRimmon. "Ha' ye ony objection to a tramp freighter? It's only fifteen a month, but they say the Blind Deevil feeds a man better than others. She's my *Kite*. Come ben. Ye can thank Dandie, here. I'm no used to thanks. An' noo," says he, "what possessed ye to throw up your berth wi' Holdock?"

"The new timin'," said I. "The *Breslau* will not stand it."

"Hoot, oot," said he. "Ye might ha' crammed her a little—enough to show ye were drivin' her—an' brought her in twa days behind. What's easier than to say ye slowed for bearin's, eh? All my men do it, and—I believe 'em."

"McRimmon," says I, "what's her virginity to a lassie?"

He puckered his dry face an' twisted in his chair. "The warld an' a'," says he. "My God, the vara warld an' a'! But what ha' you or me to do wi' virginity, this late along?"

"This," I said. "There's just one thing that each one of us in his trade or profession will *not* do for ony consideration whatever. If I run to time I run to time, barrin' always the risks o' the high seas. Less than that, under God, I have not done. More than that, by God, I will not do! There's no trick o' the trade I'm not acquaint wi'——"

"So I've heard," says McRimmon, dry as a biscuit.

"But yon matter o' fair runnin' 's just my Shekinah, ye'll understand. I daurna tamper wi' *that*. Nursing weak engines is fair craftsmanship; but what the Board ask is cheatin', wi' the risk o' manslaughter addeetional. Ye'll note I know my business."

"There was some more talk, an' next week I went aboard the *Kite*, twenty-five hunder ton, ordinary compound, a Black Bird tramp. The deeper she rode, the better she'd steam. I've snapped as much as nine out of her, but eight point three was her fair normal. Good food forward

an' better aft, all indents passed wi'out marginal remarks, the best coal, new donkeys, and good crews. There was nothin' the old man would not do, except paint. That was his deeficulty. Ye could no more draw paint than his last teeth from him. He'd come down to dock, an' his boats a scandal all along the watter, an' he'd whine an' cry an' say they looked all he could desire. Every owner has his *non plus ultra*, I've obsairved. Paint was McRimmon's. But you could get round his engines without riskin' your life, an', for all his blindness, I've seen him reject five flawed intermediates, one after the other, on a nod from me; an' his cattle-fittin's were guaranteed for North Atlantic winter weather. Ye ken what *that* means? McRimmon an' the Black Bird Line, God bless him!

' Oh, I forgot to say she would lie down an' fill her forward deck green, an' snore away into a twenty-knot gale forty-five to the minute, three an' a half knots an hour, the engines runnin' sweet an' true as a bairn breathin' in its sleep. Bell was skipper; an' forbye there's no love lost between crews an' owners, we were fond o' the auld Blind Deevil an' his dog, an' I'm thinkin' he liked us. He was worth the windy side o' twa million sterling', an' no friend to his own blood-kin. Money's an awfu' thing—overmuch—for a lonely man.

' I'd taken her out twice, there an' back again, when word came o' the *Breslau's* breakdown, just as I prophesied. Calder was her engineer—he's not fit to run a tug down the Solent—and he

fairly lifted the engines off the bed-plates, an' they fell down in heaps, by what I heard. So she filled from the after-stuffin'-box to the after-bulkhead, an' lay star-gazing, with seventy-nine squealin' passengers in the saloon, til the *Camaralzaman* o' Ramsey and Gold's Carthagena Line gave her a tow to the tune o' five thousand seven hunder an' forty pound, wi' costs in the Admiralty Court. She was helpless, ye'll understand, an' in no case to meet ony weather. Five thousand seven hunder an' forty pounds, *with* costs, an' exclusive o' new engines! They'd ha' done better to ha' kept me—on the old timin'.

'But, even so, the new Board were all for retrenchment. Young Steiner, the Jew, was at the bottom of it. They sacked men right an' left that would not eat the dirt the Board gave 'em. They cut down repairs; they fed crews wi' leavin's and scrapin's; and, reversin' McRimmon's practice, they hid their defeeciencies wi' paint an' cheap gildin'. *Quem Deus vult perrdere prrius dementat*, ye remember.

'In January we went to dry-dock, an' in the next dock lay the *Grotkau*, their big freighter that was the *Dolabella* o' Piegan, Piegan, and Walsh's Line in '84—a Clyde-built iron boat, a flat-bottomed, pigeon-breasted, under-engined, bull-nosed bitch of a five thousand ton freighter, that would neither steer, nor steam, nor stop when ye asked her. Whiles she'd attend to her helm, whiles she'd take charge, whiles she'd wait to scratch herself, an' whiles she'd buttock into a dockhead. But Holdock and Steiner had bought

her cheap, and painted her all over like the Hoor o' Babylon, an' we called her the *Hoor* for short.' (By the way, McPhee kept to that name throughout the rest of his tale; so you must read accordingly.) 'I went to see young Bannister—he had to take what the Board gave him, an' he an' Calder were shifted together from the *Breslau* to this abortion—an' talkin' to him I went into the dock under her. Her plates were pitted till the men that were paint, paint, paintin' her laughed at it. But the warst was at the last. She'd a great clumsy iron nineteen-foot Thresher propeller—Aitcheson designed the *Kite's*—and just on the tail o' the shaft, before the boss, was a red weepin' crack ye could ha' put a penknife to. Man, it was an awful crack!

"When d'ye ship a new tail-shaft?" I said to Bannister.

'He knew what I meant. "Oh, yon's a superfecial flaw," says he, not lookin' at me.

"Superfecial Gehenna!" I said. "Ye'll not take her oot wi' a solution o' continuity that like."

"They'll putty it up this evening," he said. "I'm a married man, an'—ye used to know the Board."

'I e'en said what was gie'd me in that hour. Ye know how a dry-dock echoes. I saw young Steiner standin' listenin' above me, an', man, he used language provocative of a breach o' the peace. I was a spy and a disgraced employé, an' a corrupter o' young Bannister's morals, an' he'd prosecute me for libel. He went away when I ran up the steps—I'd ha' thrown him into the

dock if I'd caught him—an' there I met McRimmon, wi' Dandie pullin' on the chain, guidin' the auld man among the railway lines.

" " McPhee," said he, " ye're no paid to fight Holdock, Steiner, Chase, and Company, Limited, when ye meet. What's wrong between you? "

" " No more than a tail-shaft rotten as a kail-stump. For ony sakes go and look, McRimmon. It's a comedietta."

" " I'm feared o' yon conversational Hebrew," said he. " Whaur's the flaw, an' what like? "

" " A seven-inch crack just behind the boss. There's no power on earth will fend it just jarrin' off."

" " When? "

" " That's beyon' my knowledge," I said.

" " So it is; so it is," said McRimmon. " We've all oor leemitations. Ye're certain it was a crack? "

" " Man, it's a crevasse," I said, for there were no words to describe the magnitude of it. " An' young Bannister's sayin' it's no more than a superfecial flaw! "

" " Weel, I tak' it oor business is to mind oor business. If ye've ony friends aboard her, McPhee, why not bid them to a bit dinner at Radley's? "

" " I was thinkin' o' tea in the cuddy," I said. " Engineers o' tramp freighters cannot afford hotel prices."

" " Na! na! " says the auld man, whimperin'. " Not the cuddy. They'll laugh at my *Kite*, for she's no plastered with paint like the *Hoor*. Bid them to Radley's, McPhee, an' send me the bill.

Thank Dandie, here, man. I'm no used to thanks." Then he turned him round. (I was just thinkin' the vara same thing.)

"Mister McPhee," said he, "this is *not* senile dementia."

"Preserve's!" I said, clean jumped oot o' mysel'. "I was but thinkin' you're fey, McRimmon."

'Dod, the auld deevil laughed till he nigh sat down on Dandie. "Send me the bill," says he. "I'm lang past champagne, but tell me how it tastes the morn'."

'Bell and I bid young Bannister and Calder to dinner at Radley's. They'll have no laughin' an' singin' there, but we took a private room—like yacht-owners fra' Cowes.'

McPhee grinned all over, and lay back to think.

'And then?' said I.

'We were no drunk in ony preceese sense o' the word, but Radley's showed me the dead men. There were six magnums o' dry champagne an' maybe a bottle o' whisky.'

'Do you mean to tell me that you four got away with a magnum and a half apiece, besides whisky?' I demanded.

McPhee looked down upon me from between his shoulders with toleration.

'Man, we were not settin' down to drink,' he said. 'They no more than made us wutty. To be sure, young Bannister laid his head on the table an' greeted like a bairn, an' Calder was all for callin' on Steiner at two in the morn' an'

painting him galley-green; but they'd been drinkin' the afternoon. Lord, how they twa cursed the Board, an' the *Grotkau*, an' the tail-shaft, an' the engines, an' a'! They didna talk o' superfeecial flaws that night. I mind young Bannister an' Calder shakin' hands on a bond to be revenged on the Board at ony reasonable cost this side o' losing their certificates. Now mark ye how false economy ruins business. The Board fed them like swine (I have good reason to know it), an' I've obsairved wi' my ain people that if ye touch his stomach ye wauken the deil in a Scot. Men will tak' a dredger across the Atlantic if they're well fed, and fetch her somewhere on the broadside o' the Americas; but bad food's bad service the world over.

‘The bill went to McRimmon, an' he said no more to me till the week-end, when I was at him for more paint, for we'd heard the *Kite* was chartered Liverpool-side.

“‘Bide whaur ye're put,” said the Blind Deevil. “Man, do ye wash in champagne? The *Kite's* no leavin' here till I gie the order, an'—how am I to waste paint on her, wi' the *Lammergeyer* docked for who knows how long, an' a'!”

‘She was our big freighter—McIntyre was engineer—an' I knew she'd come from overhaul not three months. That morn I met McRimmon's head-clerk—ye'll not know him—fair bitin' his nails off wi' mortification.

““The auld man's gone gyte,” says he. “He's withdrawn the *Lammergeyer*.”

" " Maybe he has reasons," says I.

" " Reasons! He's daft!"

" " He'll no be daft till he begins to paint," I said.

" " That's just what he's done—and South American freights higher than we'll live to see them again. He's laid her up to paint her—to paint her—to paint her!" says the little clerk, dancin' like a hen on a hot plate. "Five thousand ton o' potential freight rottin' in dry-dock, man; an' he dolin' the paint out in quarter-pound tins, for it cuts him to the heart, mad though he is. An' the *Grotkau*—the *Grotkau* of all conceivable bottoms—soaking up every pound that should be ours at Liverpool!"

"I was staggered wi' this folly—considerin' the dinner at Radley's in connection wi' the same.

" " Ye may well stare, McPhee," says the head-clerk. "There's engines, an' rollin' stock, an' iron bridges—d'ye know what freights are noo?—an' pianos, an' millinery, an' fancy Brazil cargo o' every species pourin' into the *Grotkau*—the *Grotkau* o' the Jerusalem firm—and the *Lammergeyer's* bein' painted!"

"Losh, I thought he'd drop dead wi' the fits.

"I could say no more than—"Obey orders, if ye break owners," but on the *Kite* we believed McRimmon was mad; an' McIntyre of the *Lammergeyer* was for lockin' him up by some patent legal process he'd found in a book o' maritime law. An' a' that week South American freights rose an' rose. It was sinfu'!

"Syne Bell got orders to tak' the *Kite* round to

Liverpool in water-ballast, and McRimmon came to bid's good-bye, yammerin' an' whinin' o'er the acres o' paint he'd lavished on the *Lammergeyer*.

"I look to you to retrieve it," says he. "I look to you to reimburse me! 'Fore God, why are ye not cast off? Are ye dawdlin' in dock for a purpose?"

"What odds, McRimmon?" says Bell. "We'll be a day behind the fair at Liverpool. The *Grotkau's* got all the freight that might ha' been ours an' the *Lammergeyer's*." McRimmon laughed an' chuckled—the pairfect eemage o' senile dementia. Ye ken his eyebrows wark up an' down like a gorilla's.

"Ye're under sealed orders," said he, tee-heein' an' scratchin' himself. "Yon's they"—to be opened *seriatim*.

'Says Bell, shufflin' the envelopes when the auld man had gone ashore: "We're to creep round a' the south coast, standin' in for orders—this weather, too. There's no question o' his lunacy now."

'Well, we buttocked the auld *Kite* along—vara bad weather we made—standin' in alongside for telegraphic orders, which are the curse o' skippers. Syne we made over to Holyhead, an' Bell opened the last envelope for the last instructions. I was wi' him in the cuddy, an' he threw it over to me, cryin': "Did ye ever know the like, Mac?"

'I'll no say what McRimmon had written, but he was far from mad. There was a sou'-wester brewin' when we made the mouth o' the Mersey,

a bitter cold morn wi' a gray-green sea and a gray-green sky—Liverpool weather, as they say; an' there we lay choppin', an' the men swore. Ye canna keep secrets aboard ship. They thought McRimmon was mad, too.

'Syne we saw the *Grotkau* rollin' oot on the top o' flood, deep an' double deep, wi' her new-painted funnel an' her new-painted boats an' a'. She looked her name, an', moreover, she coughed like it. Calder tauld me at Radley's what ailed his engines, but my own ear would ha' told me twa mile awa', by the beat o' them. Round we came, plungin' an' squatterin' in her wake, an' the wind cut wi' good promise o' more to come. By six it blew hard but clear, an' before the middle watch it was a sou'wester in airnest.

"She'll edge into Ireland, this gait," says Bell. I was with him on the bridge, watchin' the *Grotkau's* port light. Ye canna see green so far as red, or we'd ha' kept to leeward. We'd no passengers to consider, an' (all eyes being on the *Grotkau*) we fair walked into a liner rampin' home to Liverpool. Or, to be preceese, Bell no more than twisted the *Kite* oot from under her bows, and there was a little damnin' betwix' the twa bridges. Noo a passenger'—McPhee regarded me benignantly—"wad ha' told the papers that as soon as he got to the Customs. We stuck to the *Grotkau's* tail that night an' the next twa days—she slowed down to five knots by my reckonin'—and we lapped along the weary way to the Fastnet.'

‘But you don’t go by the Fastnet to get to any South American port, do you?’ I said.

‘We do not. We prefer to go as direct as may be. But we were followin’ the *Grotkau*, an’ she’d no walk into that gale for ony consideration. Knowin’ what I did to her discredit, I couldna’ blame young Bannister. It was warkin’ up to a North Atlantic winter gale, snow an’ sleet an’ a perishin’ wind. Eh, it was like the Deil walkin’ abroad o’ the surface o’ the deep, whuppin’ off the top o’ the waves before he made up his mind. They’d bore up against it so far, but the minute she was clear o’ the Skelligs she fair tucked up her skirts an’ ran for it by Dunmore Head. Wow, she rolled!

“She’ll be makin’ Smerwick,” says Bell.

“She’d ha’ tried for Ventry by noo if she meant that,” I said.

“They’ll roll the funnel oot o’ her, this gait,” says Bell. “Why canna Bannister keep her head to sea?”

“It’s the tail-shaft. Ony rollin’s better than pitchin’ wi’ superfecial cracks in the tail-shaft. Calder knows that much,” I said.

“It’s ill wark retreevin’ steamers this weather,” said Bell. His beard and whiskers were frozen to his oilskin, an’ the spray was white on the weather side of him. Pairfect North Atlantic winter weather!

‘One by one the sea raxed away our three boats, an’ the davits were crumpled like rams’ horns.

“Yon’s bad,” said Bell, at the last. “Ye

canna pass a hawser wi'oot a boat." Bell was a vara judeecious man—for an Aberdonian.

'I'm not one that fashes himself for eventualities outside the engine-room, so I e'en slipped down betwixt waves to see how the *Kite* fared. Man, she's the best geared boat of her class that ever left the Clyde! Kinloch, my second, knew her as well as I did. I found him dryin' his socks on the mainsteam, an' combin' his whiskers wi' the comb Janet gied me last year, for the warld an' a' as though we were in port. I tried the feed, speered into the stoke-hole, thumbed all bearin's, spat on the thrust for luck, gied 'em my blessin', an' took Kinloch's socks before I went up to the bridge again.

'Then Bell handed me the wheel, an' went below to warm himself. When he came up my gloves were frozen to the spokes, an' the ice clicked over my eyelids. Pairfect North Atlantic winter weather, as I was sayin'.

'The gale blew out by night, but we lay in smotherin' cross-seas that made the auld *Kite* chatter from stem to stern. I slowed to thirty-four, I mind—no, thirty-seven. There was a long swell the morn, an' the *Grotkau* was headin' into it west awa'.

"She'll win to Rio yet, tail-shaft or no tail-shaft," says Bell.

"Last night shook her," I said. "She'll jar it off yet, mark my word."

'We were then, maybe, a hunder and fifty mile west-sou'west o' Slyne Head, by dead reckonin'. Next day we made a hunder an' thirty—ye'll note

we were not racin’ boats—an’ the day after a hunder and sixty-one, an’ that made us, we’ll say, Eighteen an’ a bittock west, an’ maybe Fifty-one an’ a bittock north, crossin’ all the North Atlantic liner lanes on the long slant, always in sight o’ the *Grotkau*, creepin’ up by night and fallin’ awa’ by day. After the gale, it was cold weather wi’ dark nights.

‘I was in the engine-room on Friday night, just before the middle watch, when Bell whistled doon the tube: “She’s done it”; an’ up I came.

‘The *Grotkau* was just a fair distance south, an’ one by one she ran up the three red lights in a vertical line—the sign of a steamer not under control.

“Yon’s a tow for us,” said Bell, lickin’ his chops. “She’ll be worth more than the *Breslau*. We’ll go down to her, McPhee!”

“Bide a while,” I said. “The sea’s fair throng wi’ ships here.”

“Reason why,” said Bell. “It’s a fortune gaun beggin’. What d’ye think, man?”

“Gie her till daylight. She knows we’re here. If Bannister needs help he’ll loose a rocket.”

“Wha told ye Bannister’s need? We’ll ha’ some rag-an’-bone tramp snappin’ her up under oor nose,” said he; an’ he put the wheel over. We were gaun slow.

“Bannister wad like better to go home on a liner an’ eat in the saloon. Mind ye what they said o’ Holdock and Steiner’s food that night at Radley’s? Keep her awa’, man—keep her awa’. A tow’s a tow, but a derelict’s big salvage.”

"E-eh!" said Bell. "Yon's an inshot o' yours, Mac. I love ye like a brother. We'll bide whaur we are till daylight"; an' he kept her awa'.

'Syne up went a rocket forward, an' twa on the bridge, an' a blue light aft. Syne a tar-barrel forward again.

"She's sinkin'," said Bell. "It's all gaun, an' I'll get no more than a pair o' night-glasses for pickin' up young Bannister—the fool!"

"Fair an' soft again," I said. "She's signallin' to the south of us. Bannister knows as well as I that one rocket would bring the *Kite*. He'll no be wastin' fireworks for nothin'. Hear her ca'!"

'The *Grotkau* whustled an' whustled for five minutes, an' then there were more fireworks—a regular exhibeetion.

"That's no for men in the regular trade," says Bell. "Ye're right, Mac. That's for a cuddy full o' passengers." He blinked through the night-glasses where it lay a bit thick to southward.

"What d'ye make of it?" I said.

"Liner," he says. "Yon's her rocket. Ou, ay; they've waukened the gold-strapped skipper, an'—noo they've waukened the passengers. They're turnin' on the electrics, cabin by cabin. Yon's anither rocket. They're comin' up to help the perishin' in deep watters."

"Gie me the glass," I said. But Bell danced on the bridge, clean dementit. "Mails—mails—mails!" said he. "Under contract wi' the Government for the due conveyance o' the mails; an' as such, Mac, ye'll note, she may rescue life at sea,

but she canna tow!—she canna tow! Yon’s her night-signal. She’ll be up in half an hour!”

“Gowk!” I said, “an’ we blazin’ here wi’ all oor lights. Oh, Bell, but ye’re a fool.”

‘He tumbled off the bridge forward, an’ I tumbled aft, an’ before ye could wink our lights were oot, the engine-room hatch was covered, an’ we lay pitch-dark, watchin’ the lights o’ the liner come up that the *Grotkau* ’d been signallin’ for. Twenty knot she came, every cabin lighted, an’ her boats swung awa’. It was grandly done, an’ in the inside of an hour. She stopped like Mrs. Holdock’s machine; doon went the gangway, doon went the boats, an’ in ten minutes we heard the passengers cheerin’, an’ awa’ she fled.

“They’ll tell o’ this all the days they live,” said Bell. “A rescue at sea by night, as pretty as a play. Young Bannister an’ Calder will be drinkin’ in the saloon, an’ six months hence the Board o’ Trade ’ll gie the skipper a pair o’ binoculars. It’s vara philanthropic all round.”

‘We lay by till day—ye may think we waited for it wi’ sore eyes—an’ there sat the *Grotkau*, her nose a bit cocked, just leerin’ at us. She looked pairfectly rideeculous.

“She’ll be fillin’ aft,” says Bell; “for why is she doon by the stern? The tail-shaft’s punched a hole in her, an’—we’ve no boats. There’s three hunder thousand pound sterlin’, at a conservative estimate, droonin’ before our eyes. What’s to do?” An’ his bearin’s got hot again in a minute; for he was an incontinent man.

“Run her as near as ye daur,” I said. “Gie

me a jacket an' a life-line, an' I'll swum for it." There was a bit lump of a sea, an' it was cold in the wind—vara cold; but they'd gone overside like passengers, young Bannister an' Calder an' a', leaving the gangway doon on the lee-side. It would ha' been a flyin' in the face o' manifest Providence to overlook the invitation. We were within fifty yards o' her while Kinloch was garmin' me all over wi' oil behind the galley; an' as we ran past I went outboard for the salvage o' three hunder thousand pound. Man, it was perishin' cold, but I'd done my job judgmatically, an' came scrapin' all along her side slap on to the lower gratin' o' the gangway. No one more astonished than me, I assure ye. Before I'd caught my breath I'd skinned both my knees on the gratin', an' was climbin' up before she rolled again. I made my line fast to the rail, an' squattered aft to young Bannister's cabin, whaur I dried me wi' everything in his bunk, an' put on every conceivable sort o' rig I found till the blood was circulatin'. Three pair drawers, I mind I found—to begin upon—an' I needed them all. It was the coldest cold I remember in all my experience.

'Syne I went aft to the engine-room. The *Grotkau* sat on her own tail, as they say. She was vara short-shafted, an' her gear was all aft. There was four or five foot o' watter in the engine-room slummockin' to and fro, black an' greasy; maybe there was six foot. The stokehold doors were screwed home, an' the stokehold was tight enough, but for a minute the mess in the engine-

room deceived me. Only for a minute, though, an' that was because I was not, in a manner o' speakin', as calm as ordinar'. I looked again to mak' sure. 'Twas just black wi' bilge: dead watter that must ha' come in fortuitously, ye ken.'

'McPhee, I'm only a passenger,' I said, 'but you don't persuade me that six foot o' water can come into an engine-room fortuitously.'

'Wha's tryin' to persuade one way or the other?' McPhee retorted. 'I'm statin' the facts o' the case—the simple, natural facts. Six or seven foot o' dead watter in the engine-room is a vara depressin' sight if ye think there's like to be more comin'; but I did not consider that such was likely, and so, ye'll note, I was not depressed.'

'That's all very well, but I want to know about the water,' I said.

'I've told ye. There was six feet or more there, wi' Calder's cap floatin' on top.'

'Where did it come from?'

'Weel, in the confusion o' things after the propeller had dropped off an' the engines were racin' an' a', it's vara possible that Calder might ha' lost it off his head an' no troubled himself to pick it up again. I remember seein' that cap on him at Southampton.'

'I don't want to know about the cap. I'm asking where the water came from, and what it was doing there, and why you were so certain that it wasn't a leak, McPhee?'

'For good reason—for good an' sufficient reason.'

'Give it to me, then.'

'Weel, it's a reason that does not properly concern myself only. To be preceese, I'm of opinion that it was due, the watter, in part to an error o' judgment in another man. We can a' mak' mistakes.'

'Oh, I beg your pardon! Go on.

'I got me to the rail again, an', "What's wrang?" said Bell, hailin'.

"She'll do," I said. "Send's o'er a hawser, an' a man to help steer. I'll pull him in by the life-line."

'I could see heads bobbin' back an' forth, an' a whuff or two o' strong words. Then Bell said: "They'll not trust themselves—one of 'em—in this watter—except Kinloch, an' I'll no spare him."

"The more salvage to me, then," I said. "I'll make shift *solo*."

'Says one dock-rat at this: "D'ye think she's safe?'

"I'll guarantee ye nothing," I said, "except, maybe, a hammerin' for keepin' me this long."

'Then he sings out: "There's no more than one life-belt, an' they canna find it, or I'd come."

"Throw him over, the Jezebel," I said, for I was oot o' patience; an' they took haud o' that volunteer before he knew what was in store, and hove him over in the bight of the life-line. So I e'en hauled him upon the sag of it, hand-over-fist—a vara welcome recruit when I'd tilted the salt watter oot of him; for, by the way, he could not swum.

'Syne they bent a twa-inch rope to the life-line,

an’ a hawser to that, an’ I led the rope o’er the drum of a hand-winch forward, an’ we sweated the hawser inboard an’ made it fast to the *Grotkau’s* bits.

‘ Bell brought the *Kite* so close I feared she’d roll in an’ do the *Grotkau’s* plates a mischief. He hove anither life-line to me, an’ went astern, an’ we had all the weary winch-work to do again wi’ a second hawser. For all that, Bell was right : we’d a long tow before us, an’ though Providence had helped us that far, there was no sense in leavin’ too much to its keepin’. When the second hawser was fast, I was wet wi’ sweat, an’ I cried Bell to tak’ up his slack an’ go home. The other man was by way o’ helpin’ the work wi’ askin’ for drinks, but I e’en told him he must hand reef an’ steer, beginnin’ with steerin’, for I was goin’ to turn in. He steered—ou, ay, he steered, in a manner o’ speakin’. At the least, he grippit the spokes an’ twiddled ’em an’ looked wise, but I doubt if the *Hoor* ever felt it. I turned in there an’ then to young Bannister’s bunk, an’ slept past expression. I waukened ragin’ wi’ hunger, a fair lump o’ sea runnin’, the *Kite* snorin’ awa’ four knots ; an’ the *Grotkau* slappin’ her nose under, an’ yawin’ an’ standin’ over at discretion. She was a most disgracefu’ tow. But the shameful thing of all was the food. I raxed me a meal fra galley-shelves an’ pantries an’ lazareetes an’ cubby-holes that I would not ha’ gied to the mate of a Cardiff collier ; an’ ye ken we say a Cardiff mate will eat clinkers to save waste. I’m sayin’ it was simply vile ! The crew had written what *they*

thought of it on the new paint o' the fo'c'sle, but I had not a decent soul wi' me to complain on. There was nothing' for me to do save watch the hawsers an' the *Kite's* tail squatterin' down in white watter when she lifted to a sea; so I got steam on the after donkey-pump, an' pumped oot the engine-room. There's no sense in leavin' watter loose in a ship. When she was dry, I went doon the shaft-tunnel, an' found she was leakin' a little through the stuffin'-box, but nothin' to make wark. The propeller had e'en jarred off, as I knew it must, an' Calder had been waitin' for it to go wi' his hand on the gear. He told me as much when I met him ashore. There was nothin' started or strained. It had just slipped awa' to the bed o' the Atlantic as easy as a man dyin' wi' due warnin'—a most providential business for all concerned. Syne I took stock o' the *Grotkau's* upper works. Her boats had been smashed on the davits, an' here an' there was the rail missin', an' a ventilator or two had fetched awa', an' the bridge-rails were bent by the seas; but her hatches were tight, and she'd taken no sort of harm. Dod, I came to hate her like a human bein', for I was eight weary days aboard, starvin'—ay, starvin'—within a cable's length o' plenty. All day I lay in the bunk reading the *Woman-Hater*, the grandest book Charlie Reade ever wrote, an' pickin' a toothful here an' there. It was weary, weary work. Eight days, man, I was aboard the *Grotkau*, an' not one full meal did I make. Sma' blame her crew would not stay by her. The other man? Oh, I warked him to keep him crack. I warked him wi' a vengeance.

‘ It came on to blow when we fetched soundin’s, an’ that kept me standin’ by the hawsers, lashed to the capstan, breathin’ betwixt green seas. I near died o’ cauld an’ hunger, for the *Grotkau* towed like a barge, an’ Bell howkit her along through or over. It was vara thick up-Channel, too. We were standin’ in to make some sort o’ light, and we near walked over twa three fishin’-boats, an’ they cried us we were o’erclose to Falmouth. Then we were near cut down by a drunken foreign fruiter that was blunderin’ between us an’ the shore, and it got thicker and thicker that night, an’ I could feel by the tow Bell did not know whaur he was. Losh, we knew in the morn, for the wind blew the fog oot like a candle, an’ the sun came clear; and as surely as McRimmon gied me my cheque, the shadow o’ the Eddystone lay across our tow-rope! We were that near—ay, we were that near! Bell fetched the *Kite* round with a jerk that came close to tearin’ the bitts out o’ the *Grotkau*; an’ I mind I thanked my Maker in young Bannister’s cabin when we were inside Plymouth breakwater.

‘ The first to come aboard was McRimmon, wi’ Dandie. Did I tell you our orders were to take anything found into Plymouth? The auld deil had just come down overnight, puttin’ two an’ two together from what Calder had told him when the liner landed the *Grotkau*’s men. He had preceesely hit oor time. I’d hailed Bell for something to eat, an’ he sent it o’er in the same boat wi’ McRimmon, when the auld man came to me. He grinned an’ slapped his legs and worked his eyebrows the while I ate.

"How do Holdock, Steiner, and Chase feed their men?" said he.

"Ye can see," I said, knockin' the top off another beer-bottle. "I did not take to be starved, McKrimmon."

"Nor to swim, either," said he, for Bell had tauld him how I carried the line aboard. "Well, I'm thinkin' you'll be no loser. What freight could we ha' put into the *Lammergeyer* would equal salvage on four hunder thousand pounds—hull and cargo? Eh, McPhee? This cuts the liver out o' Holdock, Steiner, Chase, and Company, Limited. Eh, McPhee? An' I'm sufferin' from senile dementia now? Eh, McPhee? An' I'm not daft, am I, till I begin to paint the *Lammergeyer*? Eh, McPhee? Ye may weel lift your leg, Dandie! I ha' the laugh o' them all. Ye found watter in the engine-room?"

"To speak wi'oot prejudice," I said, "there was some watter."

"They thought she was sinkin' after the propeller went. She filled with extraordinary rappedity. Calder said it grieved him an' Bannister to abandon her."

'I thought o' the dinner at Radley's, an' what like o' food I'd eaten for eight days.

"It would grieve them sore," I said.

"But the crew would not hear o' stayin' an' takin' their chances. They're gaun up an' down sayin' they'd ha' starved first."

"They'd ha' starved if they'd stayed," said I.

"I tak' it, fra Calder's account, there was a mutiny a'most."

“Ye know more than I, McRimmon,” I said. “Speakin’ wi’oot prejudice, for we’re all in the same boat, *who* opened the bilge-cock?”

““Oh, that’s it—is it?” said the auld man, an’ I could see he was surprised. “A bilge-cock, ye say?”

““I believe it was a bilge-cock. They were all shut when I came aboard, but some one had flooded the engine-room eight feet over all, and shut it off with the worm-an’-wheel gear from the second gratin’ afterwards.”

““Losh!” said McRimmon. “The ineequity o’ man’s beyond belief. But it’s awfu’ discreditable to Holdock, Steiner, and Chase, if that came oot in court.”

““It’s just my own curiosity,” I said.

““Aweel, Dandie’s afflicted wi’ the same disease. Dandie, strive against curiosity, for it brings a little dog into traps an’ suchlike. Whaur was the *Kite* when yon painted liner took off the *Grotkau’s* people?”

““Just there or thereabouts,” I said.

““An’ which o’ you twa thought to cover your lights?” said he, winkin’.

““Dandie,” I said to the dog, “we must both strive against curiosity. It’s an unremunerative business. What’s our chance o’ salvage, Dandie?”

“He laughed till he choked. “Tak’ what I gie you, McPhee, an’ be content,” he said. “Lord, how a man wastes time when he gets old. Get aboard the *Kite*, mon, as soon as ye can. I’ve clean forgot there’s a Baltic charter yammerin’ for you at London. That’ll be

your last voyage, I'm thinkin', excep' by way o' pleasure."

'Steiner's men were comin' aboard to take charge an' tow her round, an' I passed young Steiner in a boat as I went to the *Kite*. He looked down his nose; but McRimmon pipes up: "Here's the man ye owe the *Grotkau* to—at a price, Steiner—at a price! Let me introduce Mister McPhee to you. Maybe ye've met before; but ye've vara little luck in keeping your men—ashore or afloat!"

'Young Steiner looked angry enough to eat him as he chuckled an' whustled in his dry old throat.

'“Ye've not got your award yet,” Steiner says.

'“Na, na,” says the auld man, in a screech ye could hear to the Hoc, “but I've twa million sterlin', an' no bairns, ye Judeeas Apella, if ye mean to fight; an' I'll match ye p'und for p'und till the last p'und's oot. Ye ken *me*, Steiner? I'm McRimmon o' McNaughton and McRimmon!”

'“Dod,” he said betwix' his teeth, sittin' back in the boat, “I've waited fourteen year to break that Jew-firm, an' God be thankit I'll do it now.”

'The *Kite* was in the Baltic while the auld man was warkin his warks, but I know the assessors valued the *Grotkau*, all told, at over three hunder and sixty thousand—her manifest was a treat o' richness—and McRimmon got a third for salvin' an abandoned ship. Ye see, there's vast deefERENCE between towin' a ship wi' men on her and pickin' up a derelict—a vast deefERENCE—in pounds sterlin'. Moreover, twa three o' the *Grotkau's* crew were burnin' to testify about food, an' there was a note o' Calder to the Board in regard to the tail-shaft

that would ha’ been vara damagin’ if it had come into court. They knew better than to fight.

‘Syne the *Kite* came back, and McRimmon paid off me an’ Bell personally, and the rest of the crew *prorata*, I believe it’s ca’ed. My share—oor share, I should say—was just twenty-five thousand pounds sterlin’.

At this point Janet jumped up and kissed him.

‘Five-and-twenty thousand pound sterlin’. Noo, I’m fra the North, and I’m not the like to fling money awa’ rashly, but I’d gie six months’ pay—one hunder an’ twenty pound—to know *who* flooded the engine-room of the *Grotkau*. I’m fairly well acquaint wi’ McRimmon’s eediosyncrasies, and *he*’d no hand in it. It was not Calder, for I’ve asked him, an’ he wanted to fight me. It would be in the highest degree unprofessional o’ Calder—not fightin’, but openin’ bilge-cocks—but for a while I thought it was him. Ay, I judged it might be him—under temptation.’

‘What’s your theory?’ I demanded.

‘Weel, I’m inclined to think it was one o’ those singular providences that remind us we’re in the hands o’ Higher Powers.’

‘It couldn’t open and shut itself?’

‘I did not mean that; but some half-starvin’ oiler or, maybe, trimmer must ha’ opened it a while to mak’ sure o’ leavin’ the *Grotkau*. It’s a demoralisin’ thing to see an engine-room flood up after any accident to the gear—demoralisin’ and deceptive both. Aweel, the man got what he wanted, for they went aboard the liner cryin’ that the *Grotkau* was sinkin’. But it’s curious to think

o' the consequences. In a' human probability, he's bein' damned in heaps at the present moment aboard another tramp-freighter; an' here am I, wi' five-an'-twenty thousand pounds invested, resolute to go to sea no more—providential's the preceese word—except as a passenger, ye'll understand, Janet.'

McPhee kept his word. He and Janet went for a voyage as passengers in the first-class saloon. They paid seventy pounds for their berths; and Janet found a very sick woman in the second-class saloon, so that for sixteen days she lived below, and chatted with the stewardesses at the foot of the second-saloon stairs while her patient slept. McPhee was a passenger for exactly twenty-four hours. Then the engineers' mess—where the oil-cloth tables are—joyfully took him to its bosom, and for the rest of the voyage that company was richer by the unpaid services of a highly certificated engineer.

‘Their Lawful Occasions’

‘ . . . And a security for such as pass on the seas upon their lawful occasions.’—*Navy Prayer*.

PART I

DISREGARDING the inventions of the Marine Captain, whose other name is Gubbins, let a plain statement suffice.

H.M.S. *Caryatid* went to Portland to join Blue Fleet for manœuvres. I travelled overland from London by way of Portsmouth, where I fell among friends. When I reached Portland, H.M.S. *Caryatid*, whose guest I was to have been, had, with Blue Fleet, already sailed for some secret rendezvous off the west coast of Ireland, and Portland breakwater was filled with Red Fleet, my official enemies and joyous acquaintances, who received me with unstinted hospitality. For example, Lieutenant-Commander A. L. Hignett, in charge of three destroyers, *Wraith*, *Stiletto*, and *Kobbold*, due to depart at 6 p.m. that evening, offered me a berth on his thirty-knot flagship, but I preferred my comforts, and so accepted sleeping-room in H.M.S. *Pedantic* (15,000 tons), leader of the second line.

After dining aboard her I took boat to Weymouth to get my kit aboard, as the battleships would go to war at midnight. In transferring my allegiance from Blue to Red Fleet, whatever the Marine Captain may say, I did no wrong. I truly intended to return to the *Pedantic* and help to fight Blue Fleet. All I needed was a new toothbrush, which I bought from a chemist in a side street at 9.15 P.M. As I turned to go, one entered seeking alleviation of a gumboil. He was dressed in a checked ulster, a black silk hat three sizes too small, cord-breeches, boots, and pure brass spurs. These he managed painfully, stepping like a prisoner fresh from leg-irons. As he adjusted the pepper-plaster to the gum the light fell on his face, and I recognised Mr. Emanuel Pyecroft, late second-class petty officer of H.M.S. *Archimandrite*, an unforgettable man, met a year before under 'Tom Wessels' roof in Plymouth. It occurred to me that when a petty officer takes to spurs he may conceivably meditate desertion. For that reason I, though a taxpayer, made no sign. Indeed, it was Mr. Pyecroft, following me out of the shop, who said hollowly: 'What might you be doing here?'

'I'm going on manœuvres in the *Pedantic*,' I replied.

'Ho!' said Mr. Pyecroft. 'An' what manner o' manœuvres d'you expect to see in a blighted cathedral like the *Pedantic*? I know 'er. I knew her in Malta, when the *Vulcan* was her permanent tender. Manœuvres! You won't see more than "Man an' arm watertight doors!" in your little woollen undervest.'

‘I’m sorry for that.’

‘Why?’ He lurched heavily as his spurs caught and twanged like tuning-forks. ‘War’s declared at midnight. *Pedantics* be sugared! Buy an ‘am an’ see life!’

For the moment I fancied Mr. Pyecroft, a fugitive from justice, purposed that we two should embrace a Robin Hood career in the uplands of Dorset. The spurs troubled me, and I made bold to say as much. ‘Them!’ he said, coming to an intricate halt. ‘They’re part of the *prima facie* evidence. But as for me—let me carry your bag—I’m second in command, leadin’-hand, cook, steward, an’ lavatory man, with a few incidentals for sixpence a day extra, on No. 267 torpedo-boat.’

‘They wear spurs there?’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Pyecroft, ‘seein’ that Two Six Seven belongs to Blue Fleet, which left the day before yesterday, disguises are imperative. It transpired thus. The Right Honourable Lord Gawd Almighty Admiral Master Frankie Frobisher, K.C.B., commandin’ Blue Fleet, can’t be bothered with one tin-torpedo-boat more or less; and what with lyin’ in the Reserve four years, an’ what with the new kind o’ tiffy which cleans dynamos with brick-dust and oil (Blast these spurs! They won’t render!), Two Six Seven’s steam-gadgets was paralytic. Our Mr. Moorshed done his painstakin’ best—it’s his first command of a war-canoe, matoor age nineteen (down that alley-way, please!), but be that as it may, His Holiness Frankie is aware of us crabbin’ ourselves round the breakwater at five knots, an’ steerin’ *pari passu*, as the French

say. (Up this alley-way, please!) If he'd given Mr. Hinchcliffe, our chief engineer, a little time, it would never have transpired, for what Hinch can't drive he can coax; but the new port bein' a trifle cloudy, an' 'is joints tinglin' after a post-captain dinner, Frankie come on the upper bridge seekin' for a sacrifice. We, offerin' a broadside target, got it. He told us what 'is grandmamma, 'oo was a lady an' went to sea in stick-and-string bateaus, had told him about steam. He throwed in his own prayers for the 'ealth an' safety of all steam-packets an' their officers. Then he give us several distinct orders. The first few—I kept tally—was all about going to Hell; the next many was about not evolutin' in his company, when there; an' the last all was simply repeatin' the motions in quick time. Knowin' Frankie's groovin' to be badly eroded by age and lack of attention, I didn't much panic; but our Mr. Moorshed, 'e took it a little to heart. Me an' Mr. Hinchcliffe consoled 'im as well as service conditions permits of, an' we had a *résumé*-supper at the back o' the camber—secluded *an'* lugubrious! Then one thing leadin' up to another, an' our orders, except about anchorin' where he's booked for, leavin' us a clear 'orizon, Number Two Six Seven is now—mind the edge of the wharf—here!'

By mysterious doublings hē had brought me out on to the edge of a narrow strip of water crowded with coastwise shipping that runs far up into Weymouth town. A large foreign timber-brig lay at my feet, and under the round of her stern cowered, close to the wharf-edge, a slate-

coloured, unkempt, two-funnelled craft of a type—but I am no expert—between the first-class torpedo-boat and the full-blooded destroyer. From her archaic torpedo-tubes at the stern, and quick-firers forward and amidships, she must have dated from the early 'nineties. Hammerings and clinkings, with spurts of steam and fumes of hot oil, arose from her inside, and a figure in a striped jersey squatted on the engine-room gratings.

‘She ain’t much of a war-canoe, but you’ll see more life in ’er than on an whole squadron of bleedin’ *Pedantics*.’

‘But she’s laid up here—and Blue Fleet have gone,’ I protested.

‘Pre-cisely. Only, in his comprehensive orders Frankie didn’t put us out of action. Thus we’re a non-neglectable fightin’ factor which you mightn’t think from this elevation; *an’* m’rover, Red Fleet don’t know we’re ’ere. Most of us ’—he glanced proudly at his boots—‘didn’t run to spurs, but we’re disguised pretty devious, as you might say. Morgan, our signaliser, when last seen, was a Dawlish bathing-machine proprietor. Hinchcliffe was naturally a German waiter, and me you behold as a squire of low degree; while yonder Levantine dragoman on the hatch is our Mr. Moorshed. He was the second cutter’s snotty—*my* snotty—on the *Archimandrite*—two years—Cape Station. Likewise on the West Coast, mangrove-swampin’, an’ gettin’ the cutter stove in on small an’ unlikely bars, an’ manufacturin’ lies to correspond. What I don’t know about Mr. Moorshed is precisely the same gauge as what Mr. Moorshed don’t know

about me—half a millimetre, as you might say. He comes into awful opulence of his own when 'e's of age; an' judgin' from what passed between us when Frankie cursed 'im, I don't think 'e cares whether he's broke to-morrow or—the day after. Are you beginnin' to follow our tattics? They'll be worth followin'. Or *are* you goin' back to your nice little cabin on the *Pedantic*—which I lay they've just dismounted the third engineer out of—to eat four fat meals per diem, an' smoke in the casement?'

The figure in the jersey lifted its head and mumbled.

'Yes, Sir,' was Mr. Pyecroft's answer. 'I've ascertained that *Stiletto*, *Wraith*, and *Kobbold* left at 6 P.M. with the first division o' Red Fleet's cruisers except *Devolution* and *Cryptic*, which are delayed by engine-room defects.' Then to me: 'Won't you go aboard? Mr. Moorshed 'ud like some one to talk to. You buy an 'am an' see life.'

At this he vanished; and the Demon of Pure Irresponsibility bade me lower myself from the edge of the wharf to the tea-tray plates of No. 267.

'What d'you want?' said the striped jersey.

'I want to join Blue Fleet if I can,' I replied.

'I've been left behind by—an accident.'

'Well?'

'Mr. Pyecroft told me to buy a ham and see life. About how big a ham do you need?'

'I don't want any ham, thank you. That's the way up the wharf. *Good-night.*'

‘Good-night!’ I retraced my steps, wandered in the dark till I found a shop, and there purchased, of sardines, canned tongue, lobster, and salmon, not less than half a hundredweight. A belated sausage-shop supplied me with a partially cut ham of pantomime tonnage. These things I, sweating, bore out to the edge of the wharf and set down in the shadow of a crane. It was a clear, dark summer night, and from time to time I laughed happily to myself. The adventure was preordained on the face of it. Pyecroft alone, spurred or barefoot, would have drawn me very far from the paths of circumspection. His advice to buy a ham and see life clinched it. Presently Mr. Pyecroft—I heard spurs clink—passed me. Then the jersey voice said: ‘What the mischief’s that?’

‘’Asn’t the visitor come aboard, Sir?’ ‘E told me he’d purposely abandoned the *Pedantic* for the pleasure of the trip with us. Told me he was official correspondent for the *Times*; an’ I know he’s littery by the way ’e tries to talk Navy-talk. Haven’t you seen ’im, Sir?’

Slowly and dispassionately the answer drawled long on the night; ‘Pye, you are without exception the biggest liar in the Service!’

‘Then what am I to do with the bag, Sir? It’s marked with his name.’ There was a pause till Mr. Moorshed said ‘Oh!’ in a tone which the listener might construe precisely as he pleased.

‘*He* was the maniac who wanted to buy a ham and see life—was he? If he goes back to the *Pedantic*——’

'Pre-cisely, Sir. Gives us all away, Sir.'

'Then what possessed *you* to give it away to him, you owl?'

'I've got his bag. If 'e gives anything away, he'll have to go naked.'

At this point I thought it best to rattle my tins and step out of the shadow of the crane.

'I've bought the ham,' I called sweetly. 'Have you still any objection to my seeing life, Mr. Moorshed?'

'All right, if you're insured. Won't you come down?'

I descended; Pyecroft, by a silent flank movement, possessing himself of all the provisions, which he bore to some hole forward.

'Have you known Mr. Pyecroft long?' said my host.

'Met him once, a year ago, at Devonport. What do you think of him?'

'What do *you* think of him?'

'I've left the *Pedantic*—her boat will be waiting for me at ten o'clock, too—simply because I happened to meet him,' I replied.

'That's all right. If you'll come down below, we may get some grub.'

We descended a naked steel ladder to a steel-beamed tunnel, perhaps twelve feet long by six high. Leather-topped lockers ran along either side; a swinging table, with tray and lamp above, occupied the centre. Other furniture there was none.

'You can't shave here, of course. We don't

wash, and, as a rule, we eat with our fingers when we're at sea. D'you mind?'

Mr. Moorshed, black-haired, black-browed, sallow-complexioned, looked me over from head to foot and grinned. He was not handsome in any way, but his smile drew the heart. 'You didn't happen to hear what Frankie told me from the flagship, did you? His last instructions, and I've logged 'em here in shorthand, were'—he opened a neat pocket-book—'*“Get out of this and conduct your own damned manœuvres in your own damned tinker fashion! You're a disgrace to the Service, and your boat's offal.”*'

'Awful?' I said.

'No—offal—tripes—swipes—ullage.' Mr. Pyecroft entered, in the costume of his calling, with the ham and an assortment of tin dishes, which he dealt out like cards.

'I shall take these as my orders,' said Mr. Moorshed. 'I'm chucking the Service at the end of the year, so it doesn't matter.'

We cut into the ham under the ill-trimmed lamp, washed it down with whisky, and then smoked. From the foreside of the bulkhead came an uninterrupted hammering and clinking, and now and then a hiss of steam.

'That's Mr. Hinchcliffe,' said Pyecroft. 'He's what is called a first-class engine-room artificer. If you hand 'im a drum of oil an' leave 'im alone, he can coax a stolen bicycle to do typewritin'.'

Very leisurely, at the end of his first pipe, Mr. Moorshed drew out a folded map, cut from a newspaper, of the area of manœuvres, with

the rules that regulate these wonderful things, below.

'Well, I suppose I know as much as an average stick-and-string admiral,' he said, yawning. 'Is our petticoat ready yet, Mr. Pyecroft?'

As a preparation for naval manœuvres these councils seemed inadequate. I followed up the ladder into the gloom cast by the wharf edge and the big lumber-ship's side. As my eyes stretched to the darkness I saw that No. 267 had miraculously sprouted an extra pair of funnels—soft, for they gave as I touched them.

'More *prima facie* evidence. You runs a rope fore an' aft, an' you erects perpendick-u-arly two canvas tubes, which you distends with cane hoops, thus 'avin' as many funnels as a destroyer. At the word o' command, up they go like a pair of concertinas, an' consequently collapses equally 'andy when requisite. Comin' aft we shall doubtless overtake the Dawlish bathin'-machine proprietor fittin' on her bustle.'

Mr. Pyecroft whispered this in my ear as Moorshed moved toward a group at the stern.

'None of us who ain't built that way can be destroyers, but we can look as near it as we can. Let me explain to you, Sir, that the stern of a Thornycroft boat, which we are *not*, comes out in a pretty bulge, totally different from the Yarrow mark, which again we are not. But, on the other 'and, *Dirk*, *Stiletto*, *Goblin*, *Ghoul*, *Djinn*, and *A-frite*—Red Fleet dee-stroyers, with 'oom we hope to consort later on terms o' perfect equality—*are* Thornycrofts, an' carry that Grecian bend

which we are now adjustin’ to our *arrière-pensée*—as the French would put it—by means of painted canvas an’ iron rods bent as requisite. Between you an’ me an’ Frankie, we are the *Gnome*, now in the Fleet Reserve at Pompey—Portsmouth, I should say.’

‘The first sea will carry it all away,’ said Moorshed, leaning gloomily outboard, ‘but it will do for the present.’

‘We’ve a lot of *prima facie* evidence about us,’ Mr. Pyecroft went on. ‘A first-class torpedo-boat sits lower in the water than a destroyer. Hence we artificially raise our sides with a black canvas wash-streak to represent extra freeboard; *at* the same time paddin’ out the cover of the forward three-pounder like as if it was a twelve-pounder, an’ variously fakin’ up the bows of ’er. As you might say, we’ve took thought an’ added a cubic to our stature. It’s our len’t’h that sugars us. A ’undred an’ forty feet, which is our len’t’h, into two ’undred and ten, which is about the *Gnome*’s, leaves seventy feet over, which we haven’t got.’

‘Is this all your own notion, Mr. Pyecroft?’ I asked.

‘In spots, you might say—yes; though we all contributed to make up deficiencies. But Mr. Moorshed, not much carin’ for further Navy after what Frankie said, certainly threw himself into the part with avidity.’

‘What the dickens are we going to do?’

‘Speaking as a seaman gunner, I should say we’d wait till the sights came on, an’ then fire.’

Speakin' as a torpedo-coxswain, L.T.O., T.I., M.D., etc., I presume we fall in—Number One in rear of the tube, etc., secure tube to ball or diaphragm, clear away securin'-bar, release safety-pin from lockin'-levers, an' pray Heaven to look down on us. As second in command o' 267, I say wait an' see!'

'What's happened? We're off,' I said. The timber-ship had slid away from us.

'We are. Stern first, an' broadside on! If we don't hit anything too hard, we'll do.'

'Come on the bridge,' said Mr. Moorshed. I saw no bridge, but fell over some sort of conning-tower forward, near which was a wheel. For the next few minutes I was more occupied with cursing my own folly than with the science of navigation. Therefore I cannot say how we got out of Weymouth Harbour, nor why it was necessary to turn sharp to the left and wallow in what appeared to be surf.

'Excuse me,' said Mr. Pyecroft behind us, 'I don't mind rammin' a bathin'-machine; but if only *one* of them week-end Weymouth blighters has thrown his empty baccy-tin into the sea here, we'll rip our plates open on it; 267 isn't the *Archimandrite's* old cutter.'

'I am hugging the shore,' was the answer.

'There's no actual 'arm in huggin', but it can come expensive if pursooed.'

'Right O!' said Moorshed, putting down the wheel, and as we left those scant waters I felt 267 move more freely.

A thin cough ran up the speaking-tube.

‘Well, what is it, Mr. Hinchcliffe?’ said Moorshed.

‘I merely wished to report that she is still continuin’ to go, Sir.’

‘Right O! Can we whack her up to fifteen, d’you think?’

‘I’ll try, Sir; but we’d prefer to have the engine-room hatch open—at first, Sir.’

Whacked up then she was, and for half an hour we careered largely through the night, turning at last with a suddenness that slung us across the narrow deck.

‘This,’ said Mr. Pyecroft, who received me on his chest as a large rock receives a shadow, ‘represents the *Gnome* arrivin’ cautious from the direction o’ Portsmouth, with Admiralty orders.’

He pointed through the darkness ahead, and after much staring my eyes opened to a dozen destroyers, in two lines, some few hundred yards away.

‘Those are the Red Fleet destroyer flotilla, which is too frail to panic about among the full-blooded cruisers inside Portland breakwater, and several millimetres too excited over the approachin’ war to keep a look-out inshore. Hence our tattics!’

We wailed through our siren—a long, malignant, hyena-like howl—and a voice hailed us as we went astern tumultuously.

‘The *Gnome*—Carteret-Jones—from Portsmouth, with orders—mm—mm—*Stiletto*,’ Moorshed answered through the megaphone in a high, whining voice, rather like a chaplain’s.

'Who?' was the answer.

'Carter—et—Jones.'

'Oh Lord!'

There was a pause; a voice cried to some friend, 'It's Podgie, adrift on the high seas in charge of a whole dee-stroyer!'

Another voice echoed, 'Podgie!' and from its note I gathered that Mr. Carteret-Jones had a reputation, but not for independent command.

'Who's your sub?' said the first speaker, a shadow on the bridge of the *Dirk*.

'A gunner at present, Sir. The *Stiletto*—broken down—turns over to us.'

'When did the *Stiletto* break down?'

'Off the Start, Sir; two hours after—after she left here this evening, I believe! My orders are to report to you for the manœuvre signal-codes, and join Commander Hignett's flotilla, which is in attendance on *Stiletto*.'

A smothered chuckle greeted this last. Moorshed's voice was high and uneasy. Said Pyecroft, with a sigh: 'The amount o' trouble me an' my bright spurs 'ad fishin' out that information from torpedo-coxswains and similar blighters in pubs, all this afternoon, you would never believe.'

'But has the *Stiletto* broken down?' I asked weakly.

'How else are we to get Red Fleet's private signal-code? Anyway, if she 'asn't now, she will before manœuvres are ended. It's only executin' in anticipation.'

'Go astern and send your coxswain aboard for orders, Mr. Jones.' Water carries sound well,

but I do not know whether we were intended to hear the next sentence: ‘They must have given him *one* intelligent keeper.’

‘That’s me,’ said Mr. Pyecroft, as a black and coal-stained dinghy—I did not foresee how well I should come to know her—was flung overside by three men. ‘Havin’ bought an ‘am, we will now see life.’ He stepped into the boat and was away.

‘I say, Podgie!’—the speaker was in the last of the line of destroyers, as we thumped astern—‘aren’t you lonely out there?’

‘Oh, don’t rag me!’ said Moorshed. ‘Do you suppose I’ll have to manœuvre with your flo-tilla?’

‘No, Podgie! I’m pretty sure our commander will see you sifting cinders in Tophet before you come with our flo-tilla.’

‘Thank you! She steers rather wild at high speeds.’

Two men laughed together.

‘By the way, who is Mr. Carteret-Jones when he’s at home?’ I whispered.

‘I was with him in the *Britannia*. I didn’t like him much, but I’m grateful to him now. I must tell him so some day.’

‘They seemed to know him hereabouts.’

‘He rammed the *Caryatid* twice with her own steam-pinnace.’

Presently, moved by long strokes, Mr. Pyecroft returned, skimming across the dark. The dinghy swung up behind him, even as his heel spurned it.

‘Commander Fasset’s compliments to Mr. L. Carteret-Jones, and the sooner he digs out in

pursuance of Admiralty orders as received at Portsmouth, the better pleased Commander Fasset will be. But there's a lot more——'

'Whack her up, Mr. Hinchcliffe! Come on to the bridge. We can settle it as we go. Well?'

Mr. Pyecroft drew an important breath, and slid off his cap.

'Day an' night private signals of Red Fleet complete, Sir!' He handed a little paper to Moorshed. 'You see, Sir, the trouble was, that Mr. Carteret-Jones bein', so to say, a little new to his duties, 'ad forgot to give 'is gunner his Admiralty orders in writin', but, as I told Commander Fasset, Mr. Jones had been repeatin' 'em to me, nervous-like, most of the way from Portsmouth, so I knew 'em by heart—an' better. The Commander, recognisin' in me a man of agility, cautioned me to be a father an' mother to Mr. Carteret-Jones.'

'Didn't he know you?' I asked, thinking for the moment that there could be no duplicates of Emanuel Pyecroft in the Navy.

'What's a torpedo-gunner more or less to a full lieutenant commandin' six thirty-knot destroyers for the first time?' 'E seemed to cherish the 'ope that 'e might use the *Gnome* for 'is own 'orrible purposes; but what I told him about Mr. Jones's sad lack o' nerve comin' from Pompey, an' going dead slow on account of the dark, short-circuited *that* connection. "M'rover," I says to him, "our orders is explicit; *Stiletto's* reported broke down somewhere off the Start, an' we've been tryin' to coil down a new stiff wire hawser all the evenin', so it looks like towin' 'er back, don't

it?” I says. That more than ever jams his turrets, an’ makes him keen to get rid of us. ‘E even hinted that Mr. Carteret-Jones passin’ hawsers an’ assistin’ the impotent in a sea-way might come pretty expensive on the taxpayer. I agreed in a disciplined way. I ain’t proud. Gawd knows I ain’t proud! But when I’m really diggin’ out in the fancy line, I sometimes think that me in a copper punt, single-’anded, ’ud beat a cutter-full of De Rougemongs in a row round the fleet.’

At this point I reclined without shame on Mr. Pyecroft’s bosom, supported by his quivering arm.

‘Well?’ said Moorshed, scowling into the darkness, as 267’s bows snapped at the shore seas of the broader Channel, and we swayed together.

“You’d better go on,” says Commander Fasset, “an’ do what you’re told to do. I don’t envy Hignett if he has to dry-nurse the *Gnome*’s commander. But what d’you want with signals?” ’e says. “It’s criminal lunacy to trust Mr. Jones with anything that steams.”

“May I make an observation, Sir?” I says. “Suppose,” I says, “you was torpedo-gunner on the *Gnome*, an’ Mr. Carteret-Jones was your commandin’ officer, an’ you had your reputation as a second in command for the first time,” I says, well knowin’ it was his first command of a flotilla, “what ’ud you do, Sir?” That gouged ’is unprotected ends open—clear back to the citadel.’

‘What did he say?’ Moorshed jerked over his shoulder.

‘If you were Mr. Carteret-Jones, it might be disrespect for me to repeat it, Sir.’

'Go ahead,' I heard the boy chuckle.

"Do?" 'e says. "I'd rub the young blighter's nose into it till I made a perishin' man of him, or a perspirin' pillow-case," 'e says, "which," he adds, "is forty per cent more than he is at present."

'Whilst he's gettin' the private signals—they're rather particular ones—I went forrard to see the *Dirk's* gunner about borrowin' a holdin'-down bolt for our twelve-pounder. My open ears, while I was rovin' over his packet, got the followin' authentic particulars.' I heard his voice change and his feet shifted. 'There's been a last council o' war of destroyer-captains at the flagship, an' a lot o' things 'as come out. To begin with, *Cryptic* and *Devolution*, Captain Panke and Captain Malan——'

'*Cryptic* and *Devolution*, first-class cruisers,' said Mr. Moorshed dreamily. 'Go on, Pyecroft.'

'—bein' delayed by minor defects in engine-room, did *not*, as we know, accompany Red Fleet's first division of scouting cruisers, whose rendezvous is unknown, but presumed to be somewhere off the Lizard. *Cryptic* an' *Devolution* left at 9.30 P.M. still reportin' copious minor defects in engine-room. Admiral's final instructions was they was to put in to Torbay, an' mend themselves there. If they can do it in twenty-four hours, they're to come on and join the Red battle squadron at the first rendezvous, down Channel somewhere. (I couldn't get that, Sir.) If they can't, he'll think about sendin' them some destroyers for escort. But his present intention is to go 'ammer and tongs down Channel, usin' 'is destroyers for all they're worth, an' thus

keepin’ Blue Fleet too busy off the Irish coast to sniff into any eshtuaries.’

‘But if those cruisers are crocks, why does the Admiral let ’em out of Weymouth at all?’ I asked.

‘The taxpayer,’ said Mr. Moorshed.

‘An’ newspapers,’ added Mr. Pyecroft. ‘In Torbay they’ll look as they was muckin’ about for strategical purposes—hammerin’ like blazes in the engine-room all the weary day, an’ the skipper droppin’ questions down the engine-room hatch every two or three minutes. *I’ve* been there. Now, Sir?’ I saw the white of his eye turn broad on Mr. Moorshed.

The boy dropped his chin over the speaking-tube.

‘Mr. Hinchcliffe, what’s her extreme economical radius?’

‘Three hundred and forty knots, down to swept bunkers.’

‘Can do,’ said Moorshed. ‘By the way, have her revolutions any bearing on her speed, Mr. Hinchcliffe?’

‘None that I can make out yet, Sir.’

‘Then slow to eight knots. We’ll jog down to forty-nine, forty-five, or four about, and three east. That puts us say forty miles from Torbay by nine o’clock to-morrow morning. We’ll have to muck about till dusk before we run in and try our luck with the cruisers.’

‘Yes, Sir. Their picket boats will be panickin’ round them all night. It’s considered good for the young gentlemen.’

'Hallo! War's declared! They're off!' said Moorshed.

He swung 267's head round to get a better view. A few miles to our right the low horizon was spangled with small balls of fire, while nearer ran a procession of tiny cigar-ends.

'Red hot! Set 'em alight,' said Mr. Pyecroft. 'That's the second destroyer flotilla diggin' out for Commander Fasset's reputation.'

The smaller lights disappeared; the glare of the destroyers' funnels dwindled even as we watched.

'They're going down Channel with lights out, thus showin' their zeal an' drivin' all watch-officers crazy. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll get you your pyjamas, an' you'll turn in,' said Pyecroft.

He piloted me to the steel tunnel, where the ham still swung majestically over the swaying table, and dragged out trousers and a coat with a monk's hood, all hewn from one hairy inch-thick board.

'If you fall over in these you'll be drowned. They're lammies. I'll chock you off with a pillow; but sleepin' in a torpedo-boat's what you might call an acquired habit.'

I coiled down on an iron-hard horse-hair pillow next the quivering steel wall to acquire that habit. The sea, sliding over 267's skin, worried me with importunate, half-caught confidences. It drummed tackily to gather my attention, coughed, spat, cleared its throat, and, on the eve of that portentous communication, retired up stage as a multitude whispering. Anon, I caught the tramp of armies afoot, the hum of crowded cities await-

ing the event, the single sob of a woman, and dry roaring of wild beasts. A dropped shovel clanging on the stokehold floor was, naturally enough, the unbarring of arena gates; our sucking uplift across the crest of some little swell, nothing less than the haling forth of new worlds; our half-turning descent into the hollow of its mate, the abysmal plunge of God-forgotten planets. Through all these phenomena and more—though I ran with wild horses over illimitable plains of rustling grass; though I crouched belly-flat under appalling fires of musketry; though I was Livingstone, painless and incurious in the grip of his lion—my shut eyes saw the lamp swinging in its gimbals, the irregularly gliding patch of light on the steel ladder, and every elastic shadow in the corners of the frail angle-irons; while my body strove to accommodate itself to the infernal vibration of the machine. At the last I rolled limply on the floor, and woke to real life with a bruised nose and a great call to go on deck at once.

‘It’s all right,’ said a voice in my booming ears. ‘Morgan and Laughton are worse than you!’

I was gripping a rail. Mr. Pyecroft pointed with his foot to two bundles beside a torpedo-tube, which at Weymouth had been a signaller and a most able seaman. ‘She’d do better in a bigger sea,’ said Mr. Pyecroft. ‘This lop is what fetches it up.’

The sky behind us whitened as I laboured, and the first dawn drove down the Channel, tipping the wave-tops with a chill glare. To me that

round wind which runs before the true day has ever been fortunate and of good omen. It cleared the trouble from my body, and set my soul dancing to 267's heel and toe across the northerly set of the waves—such waves as I had often watched contemptuously from the deck of a ten-thousand-ton liner. They shouldered our little hull sideways and passed, scalloped, and splayed out, toward the coast, carrying our white wake in loops along their hollow backs. In succession we looked down a lead-gray cutting of water for half a clear mile, were flung up on its ridge, beheld the Channel traffic—full-sailed to that fair breeze—all about us, and swung slantwise, light as a bladder, elastic as a basket, into the next furrow. Then the sun found us, struck the wet gray bows to living, leaping opal, the colourless deep to hard sapphire, the many sails to pearl, and the little steam-plume of our escape to an inconstant rainbow.

'A fair day and a fair wind for all, thank God!' said Emanuel Pyecroft, throwing back the cowl-like hood of his blanket coat. His face was pitted with coal-dust and grime, pallid for lack of sleep; but his eyes shone like a gull's.

'I told you you'd see life. Think o' the *Pedantic* now. Think o' her Number One chasin' the mobilised gobbies round the lower deck flats. Think o' the pore little snotties now bein' washed, fed, and taught, an' the yeoman o' signals with a pink eye wakin' bright an' brisk to another perishin' day of five-flag hoists. Whereas *we* shall caulk an' smoke cigarettes, same as the Spanish destroyers

did for three weeks after war was declared.’ He dropped into the wardroom singing :—

‘If you’re going to marry me, marry me, Bill,
It’s no use muckin’ about!’

The man at the wheel, uniformed in what had once been a tam-o’-shanter, a pair of very worn R.M.L.I. trousers rolled up to the knee, and a black sweater, was smoking a cigarette. Moorshed, in a gray Balaclava and a brown mackintosh with a flapping cape, hauled at our supplementary funnel guys, and a thing like a waiter from a Soho restaurant sat at the head of the engine-room ladder exhorting the unseen below. The following wind beat down our smoke and covered all things with an inch-thick layer of stokers, so that eyelids, teeth, and feet gritted in their motions. I began to see that my previous experiences among battleships and cruisers had been altogether beside the mark.

PART II

The wind went down with the sunset—

The fog came up with the tide,
When the Witch of the North took an Egg-shell (*bis*)

With a little Blue Devil inside.

'Sink,' she said, 'or swim,' she said,

'It's all you will get from me.

And that is the finish of him !' she said,

And the Egg-shell went to sea.

The wind got up with the morning,

And the fog blew off with the rain,

When the Witch of the North saw the Egg-shell

And the little Blue Devil again.

'Did you swim?' she said. 'Did you sink?' she said,

And the little Blue Devil replied :

'For myself I swam, but I think,' he said,

'There's somebody sinking outside.'

BUT for the small detail that I was a passenger and a civilian, and might not alter her course, torpedo-boat No. 267 was mine to me all that priceless day. Moorshed, after breakfast—frizzled ham and a devil that Pyecroft made out of sardines, anchovies, and French mustard smashed together with a spanner—showed me his few and simple navigating tools, and took an observation. Morgan, the signaller, let me hold the chamois leathers while he cleaned the searchlight (we seemed to be better equipped with electricity than

most of our class), that lived under a bulbous umbrella-cover amidships. Then Pyecroft and Morgan, standing easy, talked together of the King’s Service as reformers and revolutionists, so notably, that were I not engaged on this tale I would, for its conclusion, substitute theirs.

I would speak of Hinchcliffe—Henry Salt Hinchcliffe, first-class engine-room artificer, and genius in his line, who was prouder of having taken part in the Hat Crusade in his youth than of all his daring, his skill, and his nickel-steel nerve. I consorted with him for an hour in the packed and dancing engine-room, when Moorshed suggested ‘whacking her up’ to eighteen knots, to see if she would stand it. The floor was ankle-deep in a creamy batter of oil and water; each moving part flicking more oil in zoetrope-circles, and the gauges invisible for their dizzy chattering on the chattering steel bulkhead. Leading Stoker Grant, said to be a bigamist, an ox-eyed man smothered in hair, took me to the stokehold and planted me between a searing white furnace and some hell-hot iron plate for fifteen minutes, while I listened to the drone of fans and the worry of the sea without, striving to wrench all that palpitating firepot wide open.

Then I came on deck and watched Moorshed—revolving in his orbit from the canvas bustle and torpedo-tubes aft, by way of engine-room, conning-tower, and wheel, to the doll’s house of a foc’sle—learned in experience withheld from me, moved by laws beyond my knowledge, authoritative, entirely adequate, and yet, in heart, a child at his play. *I* could not take ten steps along the

crowded deck but I collided with some body or thing; but he and his satellites swung, passed, and returned on their vocations with the freedom and spaciousness of the well-poised stars.

Even now I can at will recall every tone and gesture, with each dissolving picture inboard or overside—Hinchcliffe's white arm buried to the shoulder in a hornet's nest of spinning machinery; Moorshed's halt and jerk to windward as he looked across the water; Pyecroft's back bent over the Berthon collapsible boat, while he drilled three men in expanding it swiftly; the outflung white water at the foot of a homeward-bound Chinaman not a hundred yards away, and her shadow-slashed, rope-purpled sails bulgingsideways like insolent cheeks; the ribbed and pitted coal-dust on our decks, all iridescent under the sun; the first filmy haze that paled the shadows of our funnels about lunch-time; the gradual die-down and dulling over of the short, cheery seas; the sea that changed to a swell; the swell that crumbled up and ran allwhither oilily; the triumphant, almost audible roll inward of wandering fog-walls that had been stalking us for two hours, and—welt upon welt, chill as the grave—the drive of the interminable main fog of the Atlantic. We slowed to little more than steerage-way and lay listening. Presently a hand-bellows foghorn jarred like a corncrake, and there rattled out of the mist a big ship literally above us. We could count the rivets in her plates as we scrooped by, and the little drops of dew gathered below them.

'Wonder why they're always barks—always

steel—always four-masted—an’ never less than two thousand tons. But they are,’ said Pyecroft. He was out on the turtle-backed bows of her; Moorshed was at the wheel, and another man worked the whistle.

‘This fog is the best thing could ha’ happened to us,’ said Moorshed. ‘It gives us our chance to run in on the quiet. . . . Hal-lo!’

A cracked bell rang. Clean and sharp (beautifully grained, too), a bowsprit surged over our starboard bow, the bobstay confidentially hooking itself into our forward rail.

I saw Pyecroft’s arm fly up; heard at the same moment the severing of the tense rope, the working of the wheel, Moorshed’s voice down the tube saying, ‘Astern a little, please, Mr. Hinchcliffe!’ and Pyecroft’s cry, ‘Trawler with her gear down! Look out for our propeller, Sir, or we’ll be wrapped up in the rope.’

267 surged quickly under my feet, as the pressure of the downward-bearing bobstay was removed. Half-a-dozen men of the foc’sle had already thrown out fenders, and stood by to bear off a just visible bulwark.

Still going astern, we touched slowly, broadside on, to a suggestive crunching of fenders, and I looked into the deck of a Brixham trawler, her crew struck dumb.

‘Any luck?’ said Moorshed politely.

‘Not till we met yeou,’ was the answer. ‘The Lard he saved us from they big ships to be spitted by the little wan. Where be’e gwine tu with our fine new bobstay?’

'Yah! You've had time to splice it by now,' said Pyecroft with contempt.

'Aie; but we'm all crushed to port like aigs. You was runnin' twenty-seven knots, us reckoned it. Didn't us, Albert?'

'Liker twenty-nine, an' niver no whistle.'

'Yes, we always do that. Do you want a tow to Brixham?' said Moorshed.

A great silence fell upon those wet men of the sea.

We lifted a little toward their side, but our silent, quick-breathing crew, braced and strained outboard, bore us off as though we had been a mere picket-boat.

'What for?' said a puzzled voice.

'For love; for nothing. You'll be abed in Brixham by midnight.'

'Yiss; but trawl's down.'

'No hurry. I'll pass you a line and go ahead. Sing out when you're ready.' A rope smacked on their deck with the word; they made it fast; we slid forward, and in ten seconds saw nothing save a few feet of the wire rope running into fog over our stern; but we heard the noise of debate.

'Catch a Brixham trawler letting go of a free tow in a fog,' said Moorshed, listening.

'But what in the world do you want him for?' I asked.

'Oh, he'll come in handy later.'

'Was that your first collision?'

'Yes.' I shook hands with him in silence, and our tow hailed us.

'Aie! yeou little man-o'-war!' The voice

rose muffled and wailing. ‘After us’ve upped trawl, us’ll be glad of a tow. Leave line just slack abaout as ’tis now, and kip a good fine look-out be’ind ’ee.’

‘There’s an accommodatin’ blighter for you!’ said Pyecroft. ‘Where does he expect we’ll be, with these currents evolutin’ like sailormen at the Agricultural Hall?’

I left the bridge to watch the wire-rope at the stern as it drew out and smacked down upon the water. By what instinct or guidance 267 kept it from fouling her languidly flapping propeller, I cannot tell. The fog now thickened and thinned in streaks that bothered the eyes like the glare of intermittent flash-lamps; by turns granting us the vision of a sick sun that leered and fled, or burying all a thousand fathom deep in gulfs of vapours. At no time could we see the trawler though we heard the click of her windlass, the jar of her trawl-beam, and the very flap of the fish on her deck. Forward was Pyecroft with the lead; on the bridge Moorshed pawed a Channel chart; aft sat I, listening to the whole of the British Mercantile Marine (never a keel less) returning to England, and watching the fog-dew run round the bight of the tow back to its mother-fog.

‘Aie! yeou little man-o’-war! We’m done with trawl. Yeou can take us home if you know the road.’

‘Right O!’ said Moorshed. ‘We’ll give the fishmonger a run for his money. Whack her up, Mr. Hinchcliffe.’

The next few hours completed my education. I saw that I ought to be afraid, but more clearly (this was when a liner hooted down the back of my neck) that any fear which would begin to do justice to the situation would, if yielded to, incapacitate me for the rest of my days. A shadow of spread sails, deeper than the darkening twilight, brooding over us like the wings of Azrael (Pycroft said she was a Swede), and, miraculously withdrawn, persuaded me that there was a working chance that I should reach the beach—any beach—alive, if not dry; and (this was when an economical tramp laved our port-rail with her condenser water) were I so spared, I vowed I would tell my tale worthily.

'Thus we floated in space as souls drift through raw time. Night added herself to the fog, and I laid hold on my limbs jealously, lest they, too, should melt in the general dissolution.

'Where's that prevaricatin' fishmonger?' said Pycroft, turning a lantern on a scant yard of the gleaming wire-rope that pointed like a stick to my left. 'He's doin' some fancy steerin' on his own. No wonder Mr. Hinchcliffe is blasphemious. The tow's sheered off to starboard, Sir. He'll fair pull the stern out of us.'

Moorshed, invisible, cursed through the megaphone into invisibility.

'Aie! yeou little man-o'-war!' The voice butted through the fog with the monotonous insistence of a strayed sheep's. 'We don't all like the road you'm takin'. 'Tis no road to Brixham. You'll be buckled up under Prawle Point by'mbye.'

‘Do you pretend to know where you are?’ the megaphone roared.

‘Iss, I reckon; but there’s no pretence to me!’

‘O Peter!’ said Pyecroft. ‘Let’s hang him at ’is own gaff.’

I could not see what followed, but Moorshed said: ‘Take another man with you. If you lose the tow, you’re done. I’ll slow her down.’

I heard the dinghy splash overboard ere I could cry ‘Murder!’ Heard the rasp of a boat-hook along the wire-rope, and then, as it had been in my ear, Pyecroft’s enormous and jubilant bellow astern: ‘Why, he’s here! Right atop of us! The blighter ’as pouched half the tow, like a shark!’ A long pause filled with soft Devonian bleatings. Then Pyecroft, *solo arpeggio*: ‘Rum? Rum? Rum? Is that all? Come an’ try it, uncle.’

I lifted my face to where once God’s sky had been, and besought The Trues I might not die inarticulate, amid these half-worked miracles, but live at least till my fellow-mortals could be made one-millionth as happy as I was happy. I prayed and I waited, and we went slow—slow as the processes of evolution—till the boat-hook rasped again.

‘He’s not what you might call a scientific navigator,’ said Pyecroft, still in the dinghy, but rising like a fairy from a pantomime trap. ‘The lead’s what ’e goes by mostly; rum is what he’s come for; an’ Brixham is ’is ’ome. Lay on, Macduff!’

A white-whiskered man in a frock-coat—as I live by bread, a frock-coat!—sea-boots, and a comforter, crawled over the torpedo-tube into Moorshed's grip and vanished forward.

'E'll probably 'old three gallon (look sharp with that dinghy!); but 'is nephew, left in charge of the *Agatha*, wants two bottles command-allowance. You're a taxpayer, Sir. Do you think that excessive?'

'Lead there! Lead!' rang out from forward.

'Didn't I say 'e wouldn' understand compass deviations? Watch him close. It'll be worth it!'

As I neared the bridge I heard the stranger say: 'Let me zmall un!' and to his nose was the lead presented by a trained man of the King's Navy.

'I'll tell 'ee where to goo, if yeou'll tell your donkey-man what to du. I'm no hand wi' steam.' On these lines we proceeded miraculously, and, under Moorshed's orders—I was the fisherman's Ganymede, even as 'M. de C.' had served the captain—I found both rum and curaçoa in a locker, and mixed them equal bulk in an enamelled iron cup.

'Now we'm just abeam o' where we should be,' he said at last, 'an' here we'll lay till she lifts. I'd take 'e in for another bottle—and wan for my nevvv; but I reckon yeou'm shart-allowanced for rum. That's nivver no Navy rum yeou'm give me. Knowed 'en by the smack tu un. Anchor now!'

I was between Pyecroft and Moorshed on the bridge, and heard them spring to vibrating atten-

tion at my side. A man with a lead a few feet to port caught the panic through my body, and checked like a wild boar at gaze, for not far away an unmistakable ship’s bell was ringing. It ceased, and another began.

‘Them!’ said Pyecroft. ‘Anchored!’

‘More!’ said our pilot, passing me the cup, and I filled it. The trawler astern clattered vehemently on her bell. Pyecroft with a jerk of his arm threw loose the forward three-pounder. The bar of the back-sight was heavily blobbed with dew; the foresight was invisible.

‘No—they wouldn’t have their picket-boats out in this weather, though they ought to.’ He returned the barrel to its crotch slowly.

‘Be yeou gwine to anchor?’ said Macduff, smacking his lips, ‘or be yeou gwine straight on to Livermead Beach?’

‘Tell him what we’re driving at. Get it into his head somehow,’ said Moorshed; and Pyecroft, snatching the cup from me, enfolded the old man with an arm and a mist of wonderful words.

‘And if you pull it off,’ said Moorshed at the last, ‘I’ll give you a fiver.’

‘Lard! What’s fivers to me, young man? My nevvie, he likes ’em; but I do cherish more on fine drink than filthy lucre any day o’ God’s good weeks. Leave goo my arm, yeou common sailorman! I tall ’ee, gentlemen, I bain’t the ram-faced, ruddle-nosed old fule yeou reckon I be. Before the mast I’ve fared in my time; fisherman I’ve been since I seed the unsense of sea-dangerin’. Baccy and spirits—yiss, an’ cigars too, I’ve run a

plenty. I'm no blind harse or boy to be coaxed with your forty-mile free towin' and rum atop of all. There's none more sober to Brix'am this tide, I don't care who 'tis—than me. *I know—I know.* Yander'm two great King's ships. Yeou'm wishful to sink, burn, and destroy they while us kips 'em busy sellin' fish. No need tall me so twanty taim over. Us'll find they ships! Us'll find 'em, if us has to break our fine new bowsprit so close as Crump's bull's horn!

'Good egg!' quoth Moorshed, and brought his hand down on the wide shoulders with the smack of a beaver's tail.

'Us'll go look for they by hand. Us'll give they something to play upon; an' do 'ee deal with them faithfully, an' may the Lard have mercy on your sows! Amen. Put I in dinghy again.'

The fog was as dense as ever—we moved in the very womb of night—but I cannot recall that I took the faintest note of it as the dinghy, guided by the tow-rope, disappeared toward the *Agatha*, Pyecroft rowing. The bell began again on the starboard bow.

'We're pretty near,' said Moorshed, slowing down. 'Out with the Berthon. (*We'll sell 'em fish, too.*) And if any one rows Navy-stroke, I'll break his jaw with the tiller. Mr. Hinchcliffe' (this down the tube), 'you'll stay here in charge with Gregory and Shergold and the engine-room staff. Morgan stays, too, for signalling purposes.' A deep groan broke from Morgan's chest, but he said nothing. 'If the fog thins and you're seen by any one, keep 'em quiet with the signals. I

can’t think of the precise lie just now, but *you* can, Morgan.’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘Suppose their torpedo-nets are down?’ I whispered, shivering with excitement.

‘If they’ve been repairing minor defects all day, they won’t have any one to spare from the engine-room, and “Out nets!” is a job for the whole ship’s company. I expect they’ve trusted to the fog—like us. Well, Pyecroft?’

That great soul had blown up on to the bridge like a feather. ‘Ad to see the first o’ the rum into the *Agathites*, Sir. They was a bit jealous o’ their commandin’ officer comin’ ’ome so richly lacquered, and at first the *conversazione* languished, as you might say. But they sprang to attention ere I left. Six sharp strokes on the bells, if any of ’em are sober enough to keep tally, will be the signal that our consort ’as cast off her tow an’ is manœuvrin’ on ’er own.’

‘Right O! Take Laughton with you in the dinghy. Put that Berthon over quietly there! Are you all right, Mr. Hinchcliffe?’

I stood back to avoid the rush of half-a-dozen shadows dropping into the Berthon boat. A hand caught me by the slack of my garments, moved me in generous arcs through the night, and I rested on the bottom of the dinghy.

‘I want you for *prima facie* evidence, in case the vaccination don’t take,’ said Pyecroft in my ear. ‘Push off, Alf!’

The last bell-ringing was high overhead. It was followed by six little tinkles from the *Agatha*,

the roar of her falling anchor, the clash of pans, and loose shouting.

'Where be gwine tu? Port your 'ellum. Aie! you mud-dredger in the fairway, goo astern! Out boats! She'll sink us!'

A clear-cut Navy voice drawled from the clouds: 'Quiet! you gardeners there. This is the *Cryptic* at anchor.'

'Thank you for the range,' said Pyecroft, and paddled gingerly. 'Feel well out in front of you, Alf. Remember your fat fist is our only Marconi installation.'

The voices resumed:

'Bournemouth steamer he says she be.'

'Then where be Brixham Harbour?'

'Damme, I'm a taxpayer tu. They've no right to cruise about this way. I'll have the laa on 'ee if anything carries away.'

Then the man-of-war:

'Short on your anchor! Heave short, you howling maniacs! You'll get yourselves smashed in a minute if you drift.'

The air was full of these and other voices as the dinghy, checking, swung. I passed one hand down Laughton's stretched arm and felt an iron gooseneck and a foot or two of a backward-sloping torpedo-net boom. The other hand I laid on broad, cold iron—even the flank of H.M.S. *Cryptic*, which is twelve thousand tons.

I heard a scrubby, raspy sound, as though Pyecroft had chosen that hour to shave, and I smelled paint. 'Drop aft a bit, Alf; we'll put a stencil under the stern six-inch casements.'

Boom by boom Laughton slid the dinghy along the towering curved wall. Once, twice, and again we stopped, and the keen scrubbing sound was renewed.

'Umpires are 'ard-'earted blighters, but this ought to convince 'em. . . . Captain Panke's stern-walk is now above our defenceless 'eads. Repeat the evolution up the starboard side, Alf.'

I was only conscious that we moved around an iron world palpitating with life. Though my knowledge was all by touch—as, for example, when Pyecroft led my surrendered hand to the base of some bulging sponson, or when my palm closed on the knife-edge of the stem and patted it timidly—yet I felt lonely and unprotected as the enormous, helpless ship was withdrawn, and we drifted away into the void where voices sang:

Tom Pearse, Tom Pearse, lend me thy gray mare,
All along, out along, down along lea!
For I want for to go to Widdicombe Fair
With Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davy, Dan'l
Whiddon, Harry Hawke,
Old Uncle Tom Cobbleigh an' all.

'That's old Sinbad an' 'is little lot from the *Agatha*! Give way, Alf! *You* might sing some-thin', too.'

'I'm no burnin' Patti. Ain't there noise enough for you, Pye?'

'Yes, but it's only amateurs. Give me the tones of 'earth and 'ome. Ha! List to the blighter on the 'orizon sayin' his prayers, Navy-fashion. 'Eaven 'elp me argue that way when I'm a warrant-officer!'

We headed with little lapping strokes toward what seemed to be a fair-sized riot.

'An' I've 'eard the *Devolution* called a happy ship, too,' said Pyecroft. 'Just shows 'ow a man's misled by prejudice. She's peevish—that's what she is—nasty-peevish. Prob'ly all because the *Agathites* are scratching 'er paint. Well, rub along, Alf. I've got the lymph!'

A voice, which Mr. Pyecroft assured me belonged to a chief carpenter, was speaking through an aperture (starboard bow twelve-pounder on the lower deck). He did not wish to purchase any fish, even at grossly reduced rates. Nobody wished to buy any fish. This ship was the *Devolution* at anchor, and desired no communication with shore boats.

'Mark how the Navy 'olds its own. He's sober. The *Agathites* are not, as you might say, an' yet they can't live with 'im. It's the discipline that does it. 'Ark to the bald an' unconvincin' watch-officer chimin' in. I wonder where Mr. Moorshed has got to?'

We drifted down the *Devolution's* side, as we had drifted down her sister's; and we dealt with her in that dense gloom as we had dealt with her sister.

'Whai! 'Tis a man-o'-war, after all! I can see the captain's whisker all gilt at the edges! We took 'ee for the Bournemouth steamer. Three cheers for the real man-o'-war!'

That cry came from under the *Devolution's* stern. Pyecroft held something in his teeth, for I heard him mumble, 'Our Mister Moorshed!'

Said a boy’s voice above us, just as we dodged a jet of hot water from some valve: ‘I don’t half like that cheer. If I’d been the old man I’d ha’ turned loose the quick-firers at the first go-off. Aren’t they rowing Navy-stroke, yonder?’

‘True,’ said Pyecroft, listening to retreating oars. ‘It’s time to go ’ome when snotties begin to think. The fog’s thinnin’, too.’

I felt a chill breath on my forehead, and saw a few feet of the steel stand out darker than the darkness, disappear—it was then the dinghy shot away from it—and emerge once more.

‘Hallo! what boat’s that?’ said the voice suspiciously.

‘Why, I do believe it’s a real man-o’-war, after all,’ said Pyecroft, and kicked Laughton.

‘What’s that for?’ Laughton was no dramatist.

‘Answer in character, you blighter! Say somethin’ opposite.’

‘What boat’s *that*?’ The hail was repeated.

‘What do yee say-ay?’ Pyecroft bellowed, and, under his breath to me: ‘Give us a hand.’

‘It’s called the *Marietta*—F. J. Stokes—Torquay.’ I began, quaveringly. ‘At least that’s the name on the name-board. I’ve been dining—on a yacht.’

‘I see.’ The voice shook a little, and my way opened before me with disgraceful ease.

‘Yesh. Dining private yacht. *Eshmesheralda*. I belong to Torquay Yacht Club. Are you member Torquay Yacht Club?’

'You'd better go to bed, Sir. Good-night.' We slid into the rapidly thinning fog.

'Dig out, Alf. Put your *nix mangiare* back into it. The fog's peelin' off like a petticoat. Where's Two Six Seven?'

'I can't see her,' I replied, 'but there's a light low down ahead.'

'The *Agatha*!' They rowed desperately through the uneasy dispersal of the fog for ten minutes and ducked round the trawler's bow.

'Well, Emanuel means "God with us"—so far.' Pyecroft wiped his brow, laid a hand on the low rail, and as he boosted me up to the trawler, I saw Moorshed's face, white as pearl in the thinning dark.

'Was it all right?' said he, over the bulwarks.

'Vaccination ain't in it. She's took beautiful. But where's 267, Sir?' Pyecroft replied.

'Gone. We came here as the fog lifted. I gave the *Devolution* four. Was that you behind us?'

'Yes, sir; but I only got in three on the *Devolution*. I gave the *Cryptic* nine, though. They're what you might call more or less vaccinated.'

He lifted me inboard, where Moorshed and six pirates lay round the *Agatha's* hatch. There was a hint of daylight in the cool air.

'Where is the old man?' I asked.

'Still selling 'em fish, I suppose. He's a darling! But I wish I could get this filthy paint off my hands. Hallo! What the deuce is the *Cryptic* signalling?'

A pale masthead light winked through the last of the fog. It was answered by a white pencil to the southward.

'Destroyer signallin' with searchlight.' Pyecroft leaped on the stern-rail. 'The first part is private signals. Ah! now she's Morsing against the fog. "P-O-S-T—yes, postpone"—"D-E-P-(go on!) departure—till—further—orders—which—will—be com (he's dropped the other m) unicated—verbally. End."' He swung round. 'Cryptic is now answering: "Ready—proceed—immediately. What—news—promised—destroyer—flotilla?"'

'Hallo!' said Moorshed. 'Well, never mind. They'll come too late.'

'Whew! That's some 'igh-born suckling on the destroyer. Destroyer signals: "Care not. All will be known later." What merry beehive's broken loose now?'

'What odds! We've done our little job.'

'Why—why—it's Two Six Seven!'

Here Pyecroft dropped from the rail among the fishy nets and shook the *Agatha* with heavings. Moorshed cast aside his cigarette, looked over the stern, and fell into his subordinate's arms. I heard the guggle of engines, the rattle of a little anchor going over not a hundred yards away, a cough, and Morgan's subdued hail. . . . So far as I remember, it was Laughton whom I hugged; but the men who hugged me most were Pyecroft and Moorshed, adrift among the fishy nets.

There was no semblance of discipline in our flight over the *Agatha's* side, nor, indeed, were

ordinary precautions taken for the common safety, because (I was in the Berthon) they held that patent boat open by hand for the most part. We regained our own craft, cackling like wild geese, and crowded round Moorshed and Hinchcliffe. Behind us the *Agatha's* boat, returning from her fish-selling cruise, yelled: 'Have 'ee done the trick? Have 'ee done the trick?' and we could only shout hoarsely over the stern, guaranteeing them rum by the hold-full.

'Fog got patchy here at 12.27,' said Henry Salt Hinchcliffe, growing clearer every instant in the dawn. 'Went down to Brixham Harbour to keep out of the road. Heard whistles to the south and went to look. I had her up to sixteen good. Morgan kept on shedding private Red Fleet signals out of the signal-book, as the fog cleared, till we was answered by three destroyers. Morgan signalled 'em by searchlight: "Alter course to South Seventeen East, so as not to lose time." They came round quick. We kept well away—on their port beam—and Morgan gave 'em their orders.' He looked at Morgan and coughed.

'The signalman, acting as second in command,' said Morgan, swelling, 'then informed destroyer flotilla that *Cryptic* and *Devolution* had made good defects, and, in obedience to Admiral's supplementary orders (I was afraid they might suspect that, but they didn't), had proceeded at seven knots at 11.23 P.M. to rendezvous near Channel Islands, seven miles N.N.W. the Casquet light. (I've rendezvoused there myself, Sir.) Destroyer flotilla would therefore follow cruisers and catch

up with them on their course. Destroyer flotilla then dug out on course indicated, all funnels sparking briskly.’

‘Who were the destroyers?’

‘*Wraith, Kobbold, Stiletto*, Lieutenant-Commander A. L. Hignett, acting under Admiral’s orders to escort cruisers received off the Dodman at 7 P.M. They’d come slow on account of fog.’

‘Then who were you?’

‘We were the *Afrite*, port engine broke down, put in to Torbay, and there instructed by *Cryptic*, previous to her departure with *Devolution*, to inform Commander Hignett of change of plans. Lieutenant-Commander Hignett signalled that our meeting was quite providential. After this we returned to pick up our commanding officer, and being interrogated by *Cryptic*, marked time signalling as requisite, which you may have seen. The *Agatha* representing the last known rallying-point—or, as I should say, pivot-ship of the evolution—it was decided to repair to the *Agatha* at conclusion of manœuvre.’

We breathed deeply, all of us, but no one spoke a word till Moorshed said: ‘Is there such a thing as one fine big drink aboard this one fine big battleship?’

‘Can do, sir,’ said Pyecroft, and got it. Beginning with Mr. Moorshed and ending with myself, junior to the third first-class stoker, we drank, and it was as water of the brook, that two and a half inches of stiff, treacly Navy rum. And we looked each in the other’s face, and we nodded, bright-eyed, burning with bliss.

Moorshed walked aft to the torpedo-tubes and paced back and forth, a captain victorious on his own quarter-deck; and the triumphant day broke over the green-bedded villas of Torquay to show us the magnitude of our victory. There lay the cruisers (I have reason to believe that they had made good their defects). They were each four hundred and forty feet long and sixty-six wide; they held close upon eight hundred men apiece, and they had cost, say, a million and a half the pair. And they were ours, and they did not know it. Indeed, the *Cryptic*, senior ship, was signalling vehement remarks to our address, which we did not notice.

'If you take these glasses, you'll get the general run o' last night's vaccination,' said Pyecroft. 'Each one represents a torpedo got 'ome, as you might say.'

I saw on the *Cryptic's* port side, as she lay half a mile away across the glassy water, four neat white squares in outline, a white blur in the centre.

'There are five more to starboard. 'Ere's the original!' He handed me a paint-dappled copper stencil-plate, two feet square, bearing in the centre the six-inch initials, 'G.M.'

'Ten minutes ago I'd ha' eulogised about that little trick of ours, but Morgan's performance has short-circuited me. Are you happy, Morgan?'

'Bustin', said the signalman briefly.

'You may be. Gawd forgive you, Morgan, for as Queen 'Enrietta said to the 'ousemaid, I never will. I'd ha' given a year's pay for ten minutes o' your signallin' work this mornin'.'

‘I wouldn’t ’ave took it up,’ was the answer. ‘Perishin’ ’Eavens above! Look at the *Devolution’s* semaphore!’ Two black wooden arms waved from the junior ship’s upper bridge. ‘They’ve seen it.’

‘*The mote on their neighbour’s beam, of course,*’ said Pyecroft, and read syllable by syllable: ‘“Captain Malan to Captain Panke. Is—sten—cilled—frieze your starboard side new Admiralty regulation, or your Number One’s private expense?”’ Now *Cryptic* is saying, “Not understood.” Poor old *Crippy*, the *Devolute’s* raggin’ ’er sore. “Who is G.M.?” she says. That’s fetched the *Cryptic*. She’s answerin’: “You ought to know. Examine own paintwork.” Oh Lord! they’re both on to it now. This is balm. This is beginning to be balm. I forgive you, Morgan!’

Two frantic pipes twittered. From either cruiser a whaler dropped into the water and madly rowed round the ship, as a gay-coloured hoist rose to the *Cryptic’s* yardarm: ‘Destroyer will close at once. Wish to speak by semaphore.’ Then on the bridge semaphore itself: ‘Have been trying to attract your attention last half-hour. Send commanding officer aboard at once.’

‘Our attention? After all the attention we’ve given ’er, too,’ said Pyecroft. ‘What a greedy old woman!’ To Moorshed: ‘Signal from the *Cryptic*, Sir.’

‘Never mind that!’ said the boy, peering through his glasses. ‘Out dinghy quick, or they’ll paint our marks out. Come along!’

By this time I was long past even hysteria.

I remember Pyecroft's bending back, the surge of the driven dinghy, a knot of amazed faces as we skimmed the *Cryptic's* ram, and the dropped jaw of the midshipman in her whaler when we barged fairly into him.

'Mind my paint!' he yelled.

'You mind mine, snotty,' said Moorshed. 'I was all night putting these little ear-marks on you for the umpires to sit on. Leave 'em alone.'

We splashed past him to the *Devolution's* boat, where sat no one less than her first lieutenant, a singularly unhandy-looking officer.

'What the deuce is the meaning of this?' he roared, with an accusing forefinger.

'You're sunk, that's all. You've been dead half a tide.'

'Dead, am I? I'll show you whether I'm dead or not, Sir!'

'Well, you may be a survivor,' said Moorshed ingratiatingly, 'though it isn't at all likely.'

The officer choked for a minute. The midshipman crouched up in the stern said, half aloud: 'Then I *was* right—last night.'

'Yesh,' I gasped from the dinghy's coal-dust. 'Are you member Torquay Yacht Club?'

'Hell!' said the first lieutenant, and fled away. The *Cryptic's* boat was already at that cruiser's side, and semaphores flicked zealously from ship to ship. We floated, a minute speck, between the two hulls, while the pipes went for the captain's galley on the *Devolution*.

'That's all right,' said Moorshed. 'Wait till the gangway's down and then board her decently.'

We oughtn’t to be expected to climb up a ship we’ve sunk.’

Pyecroft lay on his disreputable oars till Captain Malan, full-uniformed, descended the *Devolution’s* side. With due compliments—not acknowledged, I grieve to say—we fell in behind his sumptuous galley, and at last, upon pressing invitation, climbed, black as sweeps all, the lowered gangway of the *Cryptic*. At the top stood as fine a constellation of marine stars as ever sang together of a morning on a King’s ship. Every one who could get within earshot found that his work took him aft. I counted eleven able seamen polishing the breech-block of the stern nine-point-two, four marines zealously relieving each other at the life-buoy, six call-boys, nine midshipmen of the watch, exclusive of naval cadets, and the higher ranks past all census.

‘If I die o’ joy,’ said Pyecroft behind his hand, ‘remember I died forgivin’ Morgan from the bottom of my ’eart, because, like Martha, we ’ave scoffed the better part. You’d better try to come to attention, Sir.’

Moorshed ran his eye voluptuously over the upper deck battery, the huge beam, and the immaculate perspective of power. Captain Panke and Captain Malan stood on the well-browned flash-plates by the dazzling hatch. Precisely over the flagstaff I saw Two Six Seven astern, her black petticoat half hitched up, meekly floating on the still sea. She looked like the pious Abigail who has just spoken her mind, and, with folded hands, sits thanking Heaven among the pieces. I could

almost have sworn that she wore black worsted gloves and had a little dry cough. But it was Captain Panke that coughed so austere. He favoured us with a lecture on uniform, deportment, and the urgent necessity of answering signals from a senior ship. He told us that he disapproved of masquerading, that he loved discipline, and would be obliged by an explanation. And while he delivered himself deeper and more deeply into our hands, I saw Captain Malan wince. He was watching Moorshed's eye.

'I belong to Blue Fleet, Sir. I command Number Two Six Seven,' said Moorshed, and Captain Panke was dumb. 'Have you such a thing as a frame-plan of the *Cryptic* aboard?' He spoke with winning politeness as he opened a small and neatly folded paper.

'I have, sir.' The little man's face was working with passion.

'Ah! Then I shall be able to show you precisely where you were torpedoed last night in'—he consulted the paper with one finely arched eyebrow—'in nine places. And since the *Devolution* is, I understand, a sister ship'—he bowed slightly toward Captain Malan—'the same plan—'

I had followed the clear precision of each word with a dumb amazement which seemed to leave my mind abnormally clear. I saw Captain Malan's eye turn from Moorshed and seek that of the *Cryptic's* commander. And he telegraphed as clearly as Moorshed was speaking: 'My dear friend and brother officer, *I* know Panke; *you* know Panke; *we* know Panke—good little Panke!

In less than three Greenwich chronometer seconds Panke will make an enormous ass of himself, and I shall have to put things straight, unless you who are a man of tact and discernment—’

‘Carry on.’ The Commander’s order supplied the unspoken word. The cruiser boiled about her business around us; watch and watch-officers together, up to the limit of noise permissible. I saw Captain Malan turn to his senior.

‘Come to my cabin!’ said Panke gratingly, and led the way. Pyecroft and I stayed still.

‘It’s all right,’ said Pyecroft. ‘They daren’t leave us loose aboard for one revolution,’ and I knew that he had seen what I had seen.

‘You, too!’ said Captain Malan, returning suddenly. We passed the sentry between white-enamelled walls of speckless small-arms, and since that Royal Marine Light Infantryman was visibly suffocating from curiosity, I winked at him. We entered the chintz-adorned, photo-speckled, brass-fendered, tile-stoved main cabin. Moorshed, with a ruler, was demonstrating before the frame-plan of H.M.S. *Cryptic*.

‘—making nine stencils in all of my initials G.M.,’ I heard him say. ‘Further, you will find attached to your rudder, and you, too, Sir’—he bowed to Captain Malan yet again—‘one fourteen-inch Mark IV practice torpedo, as issued to first-class torpedo-boats, properly buoyed. I have sent full particulars by telegraph to the umpires, and have requested them to judge on the facts as they—appear.’ He nodded through the large window

to the stencilled *Devolution* awink with brass-work in the morning sun, and ceased.

Captain Panke faced us. I remembered that this was only play, and caught myself wondering with what keener agony comes the real defeat.

'Good God, Johnny!' he said, dropping his lower lip like a child, 'this young pup says he has put us both out of action. Inconceivable—eh? My first command of one of the class. Eh? What shall we do with him? What shall we do with him—eh?'

'As far as I can see, there's no getting over the stencils,' his companion answered.

'Why didn't I have the nets down? Why didn't I have the nets down?' The cry tore itself from Captain Panke's chest as he twisted his hands.

'I suppose we'd better wait and find out what the umpires will say. The Admiral won't be exactly pleased.' Captain Malan spoke very soothingly. Moorshed looked out through the stern door at Two Six Seven. Pyecroft and I, at attention, studied the paintwork opposite. Captain Panke had dropped into his desk chair, and scribbled nervously at a blotting-pad.

Just before the tension became unendurable, he looked at his junior for a lead. 'What—what are you going to do about it, Johnny—eh?'

'Well, if you don't want him, I'm going to ask this young gentleman to breakfast, and then we'll make and mend clothes till the umpires have decided.'

Captain Panke flung out a hand swiftly.

'Come with me,' said Captain Malan. 'Your

men had better go back in the dinghy to—their—own—ship.'

'Yes, I think so,' said Moorshed, and passed out behind the captain. We followed at a respectful interval, waiting till they had ascended the ladder.

Said the sentry, rigid as the naked barometer behind him: 'For Gawd's sake! 'Ere, come 'ere! For Gawd's sake! What's 'appened? Oh! come 'ere an' tell.'

'Tell? You?' said Pyecroft. Neither man's lips moved, and the words were whispers: 'Your ultimate illegitimate grandchildren might begin to understand, not you—nor ever will.'

'Captain Malan's galley away, Sir,' cried a voice above; and one replied: 'Then get those two greasers into their dinghy and hoist the Blue Peter. We're out of action.'

'Can you do it, Sir?' said Pyecroft at the foot of the ladder. 'Do you think it is in the English language, or do you not?'

'I don't think I can, but I'll try. If it takes me two years, I'll try.'

There are witnesses who can testify that I have used no artifice. I have, on the contrary, cut away priceless slabs of *opus alexandrinum*. My gold I have lacquered down to dull bronze, my purples overlaid with sepia of the sea, and for hell-hearted ruby and blinding diamond I have substituted pale amethyst and mere jargoon. Because I would say again 'Disregarding the inventions of the Marine Captain whose other name is Gubbins, let a plain statement suffice.'

Toomai of the Elephants

I will remember what I was. I am sick of rope and chain.

I will remember my old strength and all my forest affairs.

I will not sell my back to man for a bundle of sugar-cane,

I will go out to my own kind, and the wood-folk in their lairs.

I will go out until the day, until the morning break,

Out to the winds' untainted kiss, the waters' clean caress :

I will forget my ankle-ring and snap my picket-stake.

I will revisit my lost loves, and playmates masterless !

KALA NAG, which means Black Snake, had served the Indian Government in every way that an elephant could serve it for forty-seven years, and as he was fully twenty years old when he was caught, that makes him nearly seventy—a ripe age for an elephant. He remembered pushing, with a big leather pad on his forehead, at a gun stuck in deep mud, and that was before the Afghan War of 1842, and he had not then come to his full strength. His mother, Radha Pyari,—Radha the darling,—

who had been caught in the same drive with Kala Nag, told him, before his little milk tusks had dropped out, that elephants who were afraid always got hurt; and Kala Nag knew that that advice was good, for the first time that he saw a shell burst he backed, screaming, into a stand of piled rifles, and the bayonets pricked him in all his softest places. So before he was twenty-five he gave up being afraid, and so he was the best-loved and the best-looked-after elephant in the service of the Government of India. He had carried tents, twelve hundred pounds' weight of tents, on the march in Upper India; he had been hoisted into a ship at the end of a steam-crane and taken for days across the water, and made to carry a mortar on his back in a strange and rocky country very far from India, and had seen the Emperor Theodore lying dead in Magdala, and had come back again in the steamer, entitled, so the soldiers said, to the Abyssinian War medal. He had seen his fellow-elephants die of cold and epilepsy and starvation and sunstroke up at a place called Ali Musjid, ten years later; and afterward he had been sent down thousands of miles south to haul and pile big baulks of teak in the timber-yards at Moulmein. There he had half killed an insubordinate young elephant who was shirking his fair share of the work.

After that he was taken off timber-hauling, and employed, with a few score other elephants who

were trained to the business, in helping to catch wild elephants among the Garo hills. Elephants are very strictly preserved by the Indian Government. There is one whole department which does nothing else but hunt them, and catch them, and break them in, and send them up and down the country as they are needed for work.

Kala Nag stood ten fair feet at the shoulders, and his tusks had been cut off short at five feet, and bound round the ends, to prevent them splitting, with bands of copper ; but he could do more with those stumps than any untrained elephant could do with the real sharpened ones.

When, after weeks and weeks of cautious driving of scattered elephants across the hills, the forty or fifty wild monsters were driven into the last stockade, and the big drop-gate, made of tree-trunks lashed together, jarred down behind them, Kala Nag, at the word of command, would go into that flaring, trumpeting pandemonium (generally at night, when the flicker of the torches made it difficult to judge distances), and, picking out the biggest and wildest tusker of the mob, would hammer him and hustle him into quiet while the men on the backs of the other elephants roped and tied the smaller ones.

There was nothing in the way of fighting that Kala Nag, the old wise Black Snake, did not know, for he had stood up more than once in

his time to the charge of the wounded tiger, and, curling up his soft trunk to be out of harm's way, had knocked the springing brute sideways in mid-air with a quick sickle-cut of his head, that he had invented all by himself; had knocked him over, and kneeled upon him with his huge knees till the life went out with a gasp and a howl, and there was only a fluffy striped thing on the ground for Kala Nag to pull by the tail.

'Yes,' said Big Toomai, his driver, the son of Black Toomai who had taken him to Abyssinia, and grandson of Toomai of the Elephants who had seen him caught, 'there is nothing that the Black Snake fears except me. He has seen three generations of us feed him and groom him, and he will live to see four.'

'He is afraid of *me* also,' said Little Toomai, standing up to his full height of four feet, with only one rag upon him. He was ten years old, the eldest son of Big Toomai, and, according to custom, he would take his father's place on Kala Nag's neck when he grew up, and would handle the heavy iron *ankus*, the elephant-goad that had been worn smooth by his father, and his grandfather, and his great-grandfather. He knew what he was talking of; for he had been born under Kala Nag's shadow, had played with the end of his trunk before he could walk, had taken him down to water as soon as he could walk, and Kala Nag would no more have dreamed of disobeying his shrill little orders than

he would have dreamed of killing him on that day when Big Toomai carried the little brown baby under Kala Nag's tusks, and told him to salute his master that was to be.

'Yes,' said Little Toomai, 'he is afraid of *me*,' and he took long strides up to Kala Nag, called him a fat old pig, and made him lift up his feet one after the other.

'Wah!' said Little Toomai, 'thou art a big elephant,' and he wagged his fluffy head, quoting his father. 'The Government may pay for elephants, but they belong to us mahouts. When thou art old, Kala Nag, there will come some rich Rajah, and he will buy thee from the Government, on account of thy size and thy manners, and then thou wilt have nothing to do but to carry gold earrings in thy ears, and a gold howdah on thy back, and a red cloth covered with gold on thy sides, and walk at the head of the processions of the King. Then I shall sit on thy neck, O Kala Nag, with a silver *ankus*, and men will run before us with golden sticks, crying, "Room for the King's elephant!" That will be good, Kala Nag, but not so good as this hunting in the jungles.'

'Umph!' said Big Toomai. 'Thou art a boy, and as wild as a buffalo-calf. This running up and down among the hills is not the best Government service. I am getting old, and I do not love wild elephants. Give me brick elephant-lines, one stall

to each elephant, and big stumps to tie them to safely, and flat, broad roads to exercise upon, instead of this come-and-go camping. Aha, the Cawnpore barracks were good. There was a bazaar close by, and only three hours' work a day.'

Little Toomai remembered the Cawnpore elephant-lines and said nothing. He very much preferred the camp life, and hated those broad, flat roads, with the daily grubbing for grass in the forage-reserve, and the long hours when there was nothing to do except to watch Kala Nag fidgeting in his pickets.

What little Toomai liked was the scramble up bridle-paths that only an elephant could take; the dip into the valley below; the glimpses of the wild elephants browsing miles away; the rush of the frightened pig and peacock under Kala Nag's feet; the blinding warm rains, when all the hills and valleys smoked; the beautiful misty mornings when nobody knew where they would camp that night; the steady, cautious drive of the wild elephants, and the mad rush and blaze and hullabaloo of the last night's drive, when the elephants poured into the stockade like boulders in a landslide, found that they could not get out, and flung themselves at the heavy posts only to be driven back by yells and flaring torches and volleys of blank cartridge.

Even a little boy could be of use there, and Toomai was as useful as three boys. He would

get his torch and wave it, and yell with the best. But the really good time came when the driving out began, and the Keddah—that is, the stockade—looked like a picture of the end of the world, and men had to make signs to one another, because they could not hear themselves speak. Then little Toomai would climb up to the top of one of the quivering stockade-posts, his sun-bleached brown hair flying loose all over his shoulders, and he looking like a goblin in the torch-light; and as soon as there was a lull you could hear his high-pitched yells of encouragement to Kala Nag, above the trumpeting and crashing, and snapping of ropes, and groans of the tethered elephants. ‘*Mail, mail, Kala Nag!* (Go on, go on, Black Snake!) *Dant do!* (Give him the tusk!) *Somalo! Somalo!* (Careful, careful!) *Maro! Mar!* (Hit him, hit him!) Mind the post! *Arre! Arre! Hai! Yai! Kya-a-ah!*’ he would shout, and the big fight between Kala Nag and the wild elephant would sway to and fro across the Keddah, and the old elephant-catchers would wipe the sweat out of their eyes, and find time to nod to Little Toomai wriggling with joy on the top of the posts.

He did more than wriggle. One night he slid down from the post and slipped in between the elephants, and threw up the loose end of a rope, which had dropped, to a driver who was trying to

get a purchase on the leg of a kicking young calf (calves always give more trouble than full-grown animals). Kala Nag saw him, caught him in his trunk, and handed him up to Big Toomai, who slapped him then and there, and put him back on the post.

Next morning he gave him a scolding, and said: 'Are not good brick elephant-lines and a little tent-carrying enough, that thou must needs go elephant-catching on thy own account, little worthless? Now those foolish hunters, whose pay is less than my pay, have spoken to Petersen Sahib of the matter.' Little Toomai was frightened. He did not know much of white men, but Petersen Sahib was the greatest white man in the world to him. He was the head of all the Keddah operations—the man who caught all the elephants for the Government of India, and who knew more about the ways of elephants than any living man.

'What—what will happen?' said little Toomai.

'Happen! the worst that can happen. Petersen Sahib is a madman. Else why should he go hunting these wild devils? He may even require thee to be an elephant-catcher, to sleep anywhere in these fever-filled jungles, and at last to be trampled to death in the Keddah. It is well that this nonsense ends safely. Next week the catching is over, and we of the plains are sent back to our stations. Then we will march on smooth roads, and forget

all this hunting. But, son, I am an'ry that thou shouldst meddle in the business that belongs to these dirty Assamese jungle-folk. Kala Nag will obey none but me, so I must go with him into the Keddah ; but he is only a fighting elephant, and he does not help to rope them. So I sit at my ease, as befits a mahout,—not a mere hunter,—a mahout, I say, and a man who gets a pension at the end of his service. Is the family of Toomai of the Elephants to be trodden underfoot in the dirt of a Keddah? Bad one! Wicked one! Worthless son! Go and wash Kala Nag and attend to his ears, and see that there are no thorns in his feet ; or else Petersen Sahib will surely catch thee and make thee a wild hunter—a follower of elephants' foot-tracks, a jungle-bear. Bah! Shame! Go!'

Little Toomai went off without saying a word, but he told Kala Nag all his grievances while he was examining his feet. 'No matter,' said Little Toomai, turning up the fringe of Kala Nag's huge right ear. 'They have said my name to Petersen Sahib, and perhaps—and perhaps—and perhaps—who knows? Hai! That is a big thorn that I have pulled out!'

The next few days were spent in getting the elephants together, in walking the newly caught wild elephants up and down between a couple of tame ones, to prevent them from giving too much trouble on the downward march to the plains, and

in taking stock of the blankets and ropes and things that had been worn out or lost in the forest.

Petersen Sahib came in on his clever she-elephant Pudmini. He had been paying off other camps among the hills, for the season was coming to an end, and there was a native clerk sitting at a table under a tree to pay the drivers their wages. As each man was paid he went back to his elephant, and joined the line that stood ready to start. The catchers, and hunters, and beaters, the men of the regular Keddah, who stayed in the jungle year in and year out, sat on the backs of the elephants that belonged to Petersen Sahib's permanent force, or leaned against the trees with their guns across their arms, and made fun of the drivers who were going away, and laughed when the newly caught elephants broke the line and ran about.

Big Toomai went up to the clerk with Little Toomai behind him, and Machua Appa, the head-tracker, said in an undertone to a friend of his, 'There goes one piece of good elephant-stuff at least. 'Tis a pity to send that young jungle-cock to moult in the plains.'

Now Petersen Sahib had ears all over him, as a man must have who listens to the most silent of all living things—the wild elephant. He turned where he was lying all along on Pudmini's back, and said, 'What is that? I did not know of a

man among the plains-drivers who had wit enough to rope even a dead elephant.'

'This is not a man, but a boy. He went into the Keddah at the last drive, and threw Barmao there the rope when we were trying to get that young calf with the blotch on his shoulder away from his mother.'

Machua Appa pointed at Little Toomai, and Petersen Sahib looked, and Little Toomai bowed to the earth.

'He throw a rope? He is smaller than a picket-pin. Little one, what is thy name?' said Petersen Sahib.

Little Toomai was too frightened to speak, but Kala Nag was behind him, and Toomai made a sign with his hand, and the elephant caught him up in his trunk and held him level with Pudmini's forehead, in front of the great Petersen Sahib. Then Little Toomai covered his face with his hands, for he was only a child, and except where elephants were concerned, he was just as bashful as a child could be.

'Oho!' said Petersen Sahib, smiling underneath his moustache, 'and why didst thou teach thy elephant *that* trick? Was it to help thee steal green corn from the roofs of the houses when the ears are put out to dry?'

'Not green corn, Protector of the Poor,—melons,' said Little Toomai, and all the men sitting about broke into a roar of laughter. Most of them had taught their elephants that trick when

they were boys. Little Toomai was hanging eight feet up in the air, and he wished very much that he were eight feet under ground.

‘He is Toomai, my son, Sahib,’ said Big Toomai, scowling. ‘He is a very bad boy, and he will end in a jail, Sahib.’

‘Of that I have my doubts,’ said Petersen Sahib. ‘A boy who can face a full Keddah at his age does not end in jails. See, little one, here are four annas to spend in sweetmeats because thou hast a little head under that great thatch of hair. In time thou mayest become a hunter too.’ Big Toomai scowled more than ever. ‘Remember, though, that Keddahs are not good for children to play in,’ Petersen Sahib went on.

‘Must I never go there, Sahib?’ asked Little Toomai, with a big gasp.

‘Yes.’ Petersen Sahib smiled again. ‘When thou hast seen the elephants dance. That is the proper time. Come to me when thou hast seen the elephants dance, and then I will let thee go into all the Keddahs.’

There was another roar of laughter, for that is an old joke among elephant-catchers, and it means just never. There are great cleared flat places hidden away in the forests that are called elephants’ ball-rooms, but even these are only found by accident, and no man has ever seen the elephants dance. When a driver boasts of his skill

and bravery the other drivers say 'And when didst *thou* see the elephants dance?'

Kala Nag put Little Toomai down, and he bowed to the earth again and went away with his father, and gave the silver four-anna piece to his mother, who was nursing his baby-brother, and they all were put up on Kala Nag's back, and the line of grunting, squealing elephants rolled down the hill-path to the plains. It was a very lively march on account of the new elephants, who gave trouble at every ford, and who needed coaxing or beating every other minute.

Big Toomai prodded Kala Nag spitefully, for he was very angry, but Little Toomai was too happy to speak. Petersen Sahib had noticed him, and given him money, so he felt as a private soldier would feel if he had been called out of the ranks and praised by his commander-in-chief.

'What did Petersen Sahib mean by the elephant-dance?' he said, at last, softly to his mother.

Big Toomai heard him and grunted. 'That thou shouldst never be one of these hill-buffaloes of trackers. *That* was what he meant. Oh you in front, what is blocking the way?'

An Assamese driver, two or three elephants ahead, turned round angrily, crying: 'Bring up Kala Nag, and knock this youngster of mine into good behaviour. Why should Petersen Sahib have chosen *me* to go down with you donkeys of the

rice-fields? Lay your beast alongside, Toomai, and let him prod with his tusks. By all the Gods of the Hills, these new elephants are possessed, or else they can smell their companions in the jungle.'

Kala Nag hit the new elephant in the ribs and knocked the wind out of him, as Big Toomai said, 'We have swept the hills of wild elephants at the last catch. It is only your carelessness in driving. Must I keep order along the whole line?'

'Hear him!' said the other driver. '*We* have swept the hills! Ho! ho! You are very wise, you plains-people. Any one but a mud-head who never saw the jungle would know that *they* know that the drives are ended for the season. Therefore all the wild elephants to-night will—but why should I waste wisdom on a river-turtle?'

'What will they do?' Little Toomai called out.

'*Ohé*, little one. Art thou there? Well, I will tell thee, for thou hast a cool head. They will dance, and it behooves thy father, who has swept *all* the hills of *all* the elephants, to double-chain his pickets to-night.'

'What talk is this?' said Big Toomai. 'For forty years, father and son, we have tended elephants, and we have never heard such moonshine about dances.'

'Yes; but a plains-man who lives in a hut knows only the four walls of his hut. Well, leave thy elephants unshackled to-night and see what comes; as for their dancing, I have seen the place

where——*Bapree-Bap* ! how many windings has the Dihang River ? Here is another ford, and we must swim the calves. Stop still, you behind there.'

And in this way, talking and wrangling and splashing through the rivers, they made their first march to a sort of receiving-camp for the new elephants ; but they lost their tempers long before they got there.

Then the elephants were chained by their hind legs to their big stumps of pickets, and extra ropes were fitted to the new elephants, and the fodder was piled before them, and the hill-drivers went back to Petersen Sahib through the afternoon light, telling the plains-drivers to be extra careful that night, and laughing when the plains-drivers asked the reason.

Little Toomai attended to Kala Nag's supper, and as evening fell wandered through the camp, unspeakably happy, in search of a tom-tom. When an Indian child's heart is full, he does not run about and make a noise in an irregular fashion. He sits down to a sort of revel all by himself. And Little Toomai had been spoken to by Petersen Sahib ! If he had not found what he wanted I believe he would have burst. But the sweetmeat-seller in the camp lent him a little tom-tom—a drum beaten with the flat of the hand—and he sat down, cross-legged, before Kala Nag as the stars began to come out, the tom-tom in his lap, and he thumped and he thumped and he thumped, and

the more he thought of the great honour that had been done to him, the more he thumped, all alone among the elephant-fodder. There was no tune and no words, but the thumping made him happy.

The new elephants strained at their ropes, and squealed and trumpeted from time to time, and he could hear his mother in the camp hut putting his small brother to sleep with an old, old song about the great God Shiv, who once told all the animals what they should eat. It is a very soothing lullaby, and the first verse says:

Shiv, who poured the harvest and made the winds to blow,
Sitting at the doorways of a day of long ago,
Gave to each his portion, food and toil and fate,
From the King upon the *guddee* to the Beggar at the gate.
All things made he—Shiva the Preserver.
Mahadeo! Mahadeo! He made all,—
'Thorn for the camel, fodder for the kine,
And mother's heart for sleepy head, O little son of mine!

Little Toomai came in with a joyous *tunk-a-tunk* at the end of each verse, till he felt sleepy and stretched himself on the fodder at Kála Nag's side.

At last the elephants began to lie down one after another, as is their custom, till only Kala Nag at the right of the line was left standing up; and he rocked slowly from side to side, his ears put forward to listen to the night wind as it blew very slowly across the hills. The air was full of all the night noises that, taken together, make one big silence—the click of one bamboo-stem against the other, the rustle of

something alive in the undergrowth, the scratch and squawk of a half-waked bird (birds are awake in the night much more often than we imagine), and the fall of water ever so far away. Little Toomai slept for some time, and when he waked it was brilliant moonlight, and Kala Nag was still standing up with his ears cocked. Little Toomai turned, rustling in the fodder, and watched the curve of his big back against half the stars in heaven ; and while he watched he heard, so far away that it sounded no more than a pinhole of noise pricked through the stillness, the ' hoot-toot ' of a wild elephant.

All the elephants in the lines jumped up as if they had been shot, and their grunts at last waked the sleeping mahouts, and they came out and drove in the picket-pegs with big mallets, and tightened this rope and knotted that till all was quiet. One new elephant had nearly grubbed up his picket, and Big Toomai took off Kala Nag's leg-chain and shackled that elephant fore-foot to hind-foot, but slipped a loop of grass-string round Kala Nag's leg, and told him to remember that he was tied fast. He knew that he and his father and his grandfather had done the very same thing hundreds of times before. Kala Nag did not answer to the order by gurgling, as he usually did. He stood still, looking out across the moonlight, his head a little raised, and his ears spread like fans, up to the great folds of the Garo hills.

‘Look to him if he grows restless in the night,’ said Big Toomai to Little Toomai, and he went into the hut and slept. Little Toomai was just going to sleep, too, when he heard the coir string snap with a little ‘tang,’ and Kala Nag rolled out of his pickets as slowly and as silently as a cloud rolls out of the mouth of a valley. Little Toomai pattered after him, barefooted, down the road in the moonlight, calling under his breath, ‘Kala Nag! Kala Nag! Take me with you, O Kala Nag!’ The elephant turned without a sound, took three strides back to the boy in the moonlight, put down his trunk, swung him up to his neck, and almost before Little Toomai had settled his knees slipped into the forest.

There was one blast of furious trumpeting from the lines, and then the silence shut down on everything, and Kala Nag began to move. Sometimes a tuft of high grass washed along his sides as a wave washes along the sides of a ship, and sometimes a cluster of wild-pepper vines would scrape along his back, or a bamboo would creak where his shoulder touched it; but between those times he moved absolutely without any sound, drifting through the thick Garo forest as though it had been smoke. He was going uphill, but though Little Toomai watched the stars in the rifts of the trees, he could not tell in what direction.

Then Kala Nag reached the crest of the ascent

and stopped for a minute, and Little Toomai could see the tops of the trees lying all speckled and furry under the moonlight for miles and miles, and the blue-white mist over the river in the hollow. Toomai leaned forward and looked, and he felt that the forest was awake below him—awake and alive and crowded. A big brown fruit-eating bat brushed past his ear; a porcupine's quills rattled in the thicket; and in the darkness between the tree-stems he heard a hog-bear digging hard in the moist, warm earth, and snuffing as it digged.

Then the branches closed over his head again, and Kala Nag began to go down into the valley—not quietly this time, but as a runaway gun goes down a steep bank—in one rush. The huge limbs moved as steadily as pistons, eight feet to each stride, and the wrinkled skin of the elbow-points rustled. The undergrowth on either side of him ripped with a noise like torn canvas, and the saplings that he heaved away right and left with his shoulders sprang back again, and banged him on the flank, and great trails of creepers, all matted together, hung from his tusks as he threw his head from side to side and ploughed out his pathway. Then Little Toomai laid himself down close to the great neck, lest a swinging bough should sweep him to the ground, and he wished that he were back in the lines again.

The grass began to get squashy, and Kala Nag's feet sucked and squelched as he put them down,

and the night mist at the bottom of the valley chilled Little Toomai. There was a splash and a trample, and the rush of running water, and Kala Nag strode through the bed of a river, feeling his way at each step. Above the noise of the water, as it swirled round the elephant's legs, Little Toomai could hear more splashing and some trumpeting both up stream and down—great grunts and angry snortings, and all the mist about him seemed to be full of rolling, wavy shadows.

'*Ai!*' he said, half aloud, his teeth chattering. 'The elephant-folk are out to-night. It *is* the dance, then.'

Kala Nag swashed out of the water, blew his trunk clear, and began another climb; but this time he was not alone, and he had not to make his path. That was made already, six feet wide, in front of him, where the bent jungle-grass was trying to recover itself and stand up. Many elephants must have gone that way only a few minutes before. Little Toomai looked back, and behind him a great wild tusker, with his little pig's eyes glowing like hot coals, was just lifting himself out of the misty river. Then the trees closed up again, and they went on and up, with trumpetings and crashings, and the sound of breaking branches on every side of them.

At last Kala Nag stood still between two tree-trunks at the very top of the hill. They were part of a circle of trees that grew round an irregular

space of some three or four acres, and in all that space, as Little Toomai could see, the ground had been trampled down as hard as a brick floor. Some trees grew in the centre of the clearing, but their bark was rubbed away, and the white wood beneath showed all shiny and polished in the patches of moonlight. There were creepers hanging from the upper branches, and the bells of the flowers of the creepers, great waxy white things like convolvuluses, hung down fast asleep; but within the limits of the clearing there was not a single blade of green—nothing but the trampled earth.

The moonlight showed it all iron-gray, except where some elephants stood upon it, and their shadows were inky black. Little Toomai looked, holding his breath, with his eyes starting out of his head, and as he looked, more and more and more elephants swung out into the open from between the tree-trunks. Little Toomai could count only up to ten, and he counted again and again on his fingers till he lost count of the tens, and his head began to swim. Outside the clearing he could hear them crashing in the undergrowth as they worked their way up the hillside; but as soon as they were within the circle of the tree-trunks they moved like ghosts.

There were white-tusked wild males, with fallen leaves and nuts and twigs lying in the wrinkles of their necks and the folds of their ears; fat, slow-footed she-elephants, with restless little pinky-black

calves only three or four feet high running under their stomachs; young elephants with their tusks just beginning to show, and very proud of them; lanky, scraggy old-maid elephants, with their hollow, anxious faces, and trunks like rough bark; savage old bull-elephants, scarred from shoulder to flank with great weals and cuts of bygone fights, and the caked dirt of their solitary mud-baths dropping from their shoulders; and there was one with a broken tusk and the marks of the full-stroke, the terrible drawing scrape, of a tiger's claws on his side.

They were standing head to head, or walking to and fro across the ground in couples, or rocking and swaying all by themselves—scores and scores of elephants.

Toomai knew that, so long as he lay still on Kala Nag's neck, nothing would happen to him; for even in the rush and scramble of a Keddah-drive a wild elephant does not reach up with his trunk and drag a man off the neck of a tame elephant; and these elephants were not thinking of men that night. Once they started and put their ears forward when they heard the chinking of a leg-iron in the forest, but it was Pudmini, Petersen Sahib's pet elephant, her chain snapped short off, grunting, snuffling up the hillside. She must have broken her pickets, and come straight from Petersen Sahib's camp; and Little Toomai saw another elephant, one that he did not know, with deep rope-galls on his back and

breast. He, too, must have run away from some camp in the hills about.

At last there was no sound of any more elephants moving in the forest, and Kala Nag rolled out from his station between the trees and went into the middle of the crowd, clucking and gurgling, and all the elephants began to talk in their own tongue, and to move about.

Still lying down, Little Toomai looked down upon scores and scores of broad backs, and wagging ears, and tossing trunks, and little rolling eyes. He heard the click of tusks as they crossed other tusks by accident, and the dry rustle of trunks twined together, and the chafing of enormous sides and shoulders in the crowd, and the incessant flick and *hissh* of the great tails. Then a cloud came over the moon, and he sat in black darkness; but the quiet, steady hustling and pushing and gurgling went on just the same. He knew that there were elephants all round Kala Nag, and that there was no chance of backing him out of the assembly; so he set his teeth and shivered. In a Keddah at least there was torch-light and shouting, but here he was all alone in the dark, and once a trunk came up and touched him on the knee.

Then an elephant trumpeted, and they all took it up for five or ten terrible seconds. The dew from the trees above spattered down like rain on the unseen backs, and a dull booming noise began, not

very loud at first, and Little Toomai could not tell what it was ; But it grew and grew, and Kala Nag lifted up one fore foot and then the other, and brought them down on the ground—one-two, one-two, as steadily as trip-hammers. The elephants were stamping all together now, and it sounded like a war-drum beaten at the mouth of a cave. The dew fell from the trees till there was no more left to fall, and the booming went on, and the ground rocked and shivered, and Little Toomai put his hands up to his ears to shut out the sound. But it was all one gigantic jar that ran through him—this stamp of hundreds of heavy feet on the raw earth. Once or twice he could feel Kala Nag and all the others surge forward a few strides, and the thumping would change to the crushing sound of juicy green things being bruised, but in a minute or two the boom of feet on hard earth began again. A tree was creaking and groaning somewhere near him. He put out his arm and felt the bark, but Kala Nag moved forward, still tramping, and he could not tell where he was in the clearing. There was no sound from the elephants, except once, when two or three little calves squeaked together. Then he heard a thump and a shuffle, and the booming went on. It must have lasted fully two hours, and Little Toomai ached in every nerve ; but he knew by the smell of the night air that the dawn was coming.

The morning broke in one sheet of pale yellow

behind the green hills, and the booming stopped with the first ray, as though the light had been an order. Before Little Toomai had got the ringing out of his head, before even he had shifted his position, there was not an elephant in sight except Kala Nag, Pudmini, and the elephant with the rope-galls, and there was neither sign nor rustle nor whisper down the hillsides to show where the others had gone.

Little Toomai stared again and again. The clearing, as he remembered it, had grown in the night. More trees stood in the middle of it, but the undergrowth and the jungle-grass at the sides had been rolled back. Little Toomai stared once more. Now he understood the trampling. The elephants had stamped out more room — had stamped the thick grass and juicy cane to trash, the trash into slivers, the slivers into tiny fibres, and the fibres into hard earth.

‘Wah!’ said Little Toomai, and his eyes were very heavy. ‘Kala Nag, my lord, let us keep by Pudmini and go to Petersen Sahib’s camp, or I shall drop from thy neck.’

The third elephant watched the two go away, snorted, wheeled round, and took his own path. He may have belonged to some little native king’s establishment, fifty or sixty or a hundred miles away.

Two hours later, as Petersen Sahib was eating early breakfast, the elephants, who had been

double-chained that night, began to trumpet, and Pudmini, mired to the shoulders, with Kala Nag, very foot-sore, shambled into the camp.

Little Toomai's face was gray and pinched, and his hair was full of leaves and drenched with dew; but he tried to salute Petersen Sahib, and cried faintly: 'The dance—the elephant-dance! I have seen it, and—I die!' As Kala Nag sat down he slid off his neck in a dead faint.

But, since native children have no nerves worth speaking of, in two hours he was lying very contentedly in Petersen Sahib's hammock with Petersen Sahib's shooting-coat under his head, and a glass of warm milk, a little brandy, with a dash of quinine inside of him; and while the old hairy, scarred hunters of the jungles sat three-deep before him, looking at him as though he were a spirit, he told his tale in short words, as a child will, and wound up with:

'Now, if I lie in one word, send men to see, and they will find that the elephant-folk have trampled down more room in their dance-room, and they will find ten and ten, and many times ten, tracks leading to that dance-room. They made more room with their feet. I have seen it. Kala Nag took me, and I saw. Also Kala Nag is very leg-weary!'

Little Toomai lay back and slept all through the long afternoon and into the twilight, and

while he slept Petersen Sahib and Machua Appa followed the track of the two elephants for fifteen miles across the hills. Petersen Sahib had spent eighteen years in catching elephants, and he had only once before found such a dance-place. Machua Appa had no need to look twice at the clearing to see what had been done there, or to scratch with his toe in the packed, rammed earth.

‘The child speaks truth,’ said he. ‘All this was done last night, and I have counted seventy tracks crossing the river. See, Sahib, where Pudmini’s leg-iron cut the bark off that tree! Yes; she was there too.’

They looked at each other, and up and down, and they wondered; for the ways of elephants are beyond the wit of any man, black or white, to fathom.

‘Forty years and five,’ said Machua Appa, ‘have I followed my lord, the elephant, but never have I heard that any child of man had seen what this child has seen. By all the Gods of the Hills, it is—what can we say?’ and he shook his head.

When they got back to camp it was time for the evening meal. Petersen Sahib ate alone in his tent, but he gave orders that the camp should have two sheep and some fowls, as well as a double ration of flour and rice and salt, for he knew that there would be a feast.

Big Toomai had come up hot-foot from the camp in the plains to search for his son and his elephant,

and now that he had found them he looked at them as though he were afraid of them both. And there was a feast by the blazing camp-fires in front of the lines of picketed elephants, and Little Toomai was the hero of it all ; and the big brown elephant-catchers, the trackers and drivers and ropers, and the men who know all the secrets of breaking the wildest elephants, passed him from one to the other, and they marked his forehead with blood from the breast of a newly killed jungle-cock, to show that he was a forester, initiated and free of all the jungles.

And at last, when the flames died down, and the red light of the logs made the elephants look as though they had been dipped in blood too, Machua Appa, the head of all the drivers of all the Keddahs,—Machua Appa, Petersen Sahib's other self, who had never seen a made road in forty years : Machua Appa, who was so great that he had no other name than Machua Appa,—leaped to his feet, with Little Toomai held high in the air above his head, and shouted : ' Listen, my brothers. Listen, too, you my lords in the lines there, for I, Machua Appa, am speaking ! This little one shall no more be called Little Toomai, but Toomai of the Elephants, as his great-grandfather was called before him. What never man has seen he has seen through the long night, and the favour of the elephant-folk and

of the Gods of the Jungles is with him. He shall become a great tracker; he shall become greater than I, even I—Machua Appa! He shall follow the new trail, and the stale trail, and the mixed trail, with a clear eye! He shall take no harm in the Keddah when he runs under their bellies to rope the wild tuskers; and if he slips before the feet of the charging bull-elephant, that bull-elephant shall know who he is and shall not crush him. *Aihai!* my lords in the chains,—he whirled up the line of pickets,—‘here is the little one that has seen your dances in your hidden places—the sight that never man saw! Give him honour, my lords! *Salaam karo*, my children. Make your salute to Toomai of the Elephants! Gunga Pershad, ahaa! Hira Guj, Birchi Guj, Kuttar Guj, ahaa! Pudmini,—thou hast seen him at the dance, and thou too, Kala Nag, my pearl among elephants!—ahaa! Together! To Toomai of the Elephants. *Barrao!*’

And at that last wild yell the whole line flung up their trunks till the tips touched their foreheads, and broke out into the full salute, the crashing trumpet-peal that only the Viceroy of India hears—the Salaamut of the Keddah.

But it was all for the sake of Little Toomai, who had seen what never man had seen before—the dance of the elephants at night and alone in the heart of the Garo hills!

‘ They ’

ONE view called me to another ; one hill-top to its fellow, half across the county, and since I could answer at no more trouble than the snapping forward of a lever, I let the county flow under my wheels. The orchid-studded flats of the East gave way to the thyme, ilex, and grey grass of the Downs ; these again to the rich cornland and fig-trees of the lower coast, where you carry the beat of the tide on your left hand for fifteen level miles ; and when at last I turned inland through a huddle of rounded hills and woods I had run myself clean out of my known marks. Beyond that precise hamlet which stands godmother to the capital of the United States, I found hidden villages where bees, the only things awake, boomed in eighty-foot lindens that overhung grey Norman churches ; miraculous brooks diving under stone bridges built for heavier traffic than would ever vex them again ; tithe-barns larger than their churches, and an old smithy that cried out aloud how it had once been a hall of the Knights of the Temple. Gipsies I found on a common where the gorse, bracken, and heath fought it out together up a mile of Roman road ;

and a little farther on I disturbed a red fox rolling dog-fashion in the naked sunlight. ‘

As the wooded hills closed about me I stood up in the car to take the bearings of that great Down whose ringed head is a landmark for fifty miles across the low countries. I judged that the lie of the country would bring me across some westward-running road that went to his feet, but I did not allow for the confusing veils of the woods. A quick turn plunged me first into a green cutting brim-full of liquid sunshine, next into a gloomy tunnel where last year’s dead leaves whispered and scuffled about my tyres. The strong hazel stuff meeting overhead had not been cut for a couple of generations at least, nor had any axe helped the moss-cankered oak and beech to spring above them. Here the road changed frankly into a carpeted ride on whose brown velvet spent primrose-clumps showed like jade, and a few sickly, white-stalked bluebells nodded together. As the slope favoured I shut off the power and slid over the whirled leaves, expecting every moment to meet a keeper ; but I only heard a jay, far off, arguing against the silence under the twilight of the trees.

Still the track descended. I was on the point of reversing and working my way back on the second speed ere I ended in some swamp, when I saw sunshine through the tangle ahead and lifted the brake.

It was down again at once. As the light beat across my face my fore-wheels took the turf of a great still lawn from which sprang horsemen ten

feet high with levelled lances, monstrous peacocks, and sleek round-headed maids of honour—blue, black, and glistening—all of clipped yew. Across the lawn—the marshalled woods besieged it on three sides—stood an ancient house of lichened and weather-worn stone, with mullioned windows and roofs of rose-red tile. It was flanked by semi-circular walls, also rose-red, that closed the lawn on the fourth side, and at their feet a box hedge grew man-high. There were doves on the roof about the slim brick chimneys, and I caught a glimpse of an octagonal dove-house behind the screening wall.

Here, then, I stayed ; a horseman’s green spear laid at my breast ; held by the exceeding beauty of that jewel in that setting.

‘ If I am not packed off for a trespasser, or if this knight does not ride a wallop at me,’ thought I, ‘ Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth at least must come out of that half-open garden door and ask me to tea.’

A child appeared at an upper window, and I thought the little thing waved a friendly hand. But it was to call a companion, for presently another bright head showed. Then I heard a laugh among the yew-peacocks, and turning to make sure (till then I had been watching the house only) I saw the silver of a fountain behind a hedge thrown up against the sun. The doves on the roof cooed to the cooing water ; but between the two notes I caught the utterly happy chuckle of a child absorbed in some light mischief.

The garden door—heavy oak sunk deep in the

thickness of the wall—opened further : a woman in a big garden hat set her foot slowly on the time-hollowed stone step and as slowly walked across the turf. I was forming some apology when she lifted up her head and I saw that she was blind.

'I heard you,' she said. 'Isn't that a motor car?'

'I'm afraid I've made a mistake in my road. I should have turned off up above—I never dreamed——' I began.

'But I'm very glad. Fancy a motor car coming into the garden! It will be such a treat——' She turned and made as though looking about her. 'You—you haven't seen any one, have you—perhaps?'

'No one to speak to, but the children seemed interested at a distance.'

'Which?'

'I saw a couple up at the window just now, and I think I heard a little chap in the grounds.'

'Oh, lucky you!' she cried, and her face brightened. 'I hear them, of course, but that's all. You've seen them and heard them?'

'Yes,' I answered. 'And if I know anything of children, one of them's having a beautiful time by the fountain yonder. Escaped, I should imagine.'

'You're fond of children?'

I gave her one or two reasons why I did not altogether hate them.

'Of course, of course,' she said. 'Then you understand. Then you won't think it foolish if I ask you to take your car through the gardens,

once or twice—quite slowly. I’m sure they’d like to see it. They see so little, poor things. One tries to make their life pleasant, but——’ she threw out her hands towards the woods. ‘ We’re so out of the world here.’

‘ That will be splendid,’ I said. ‘ But I can’t cut up your grass.’

She faced to the right. ‘ Wait a minute,’ she said. ‘ We’re at the South gate, aren’t we? Behind those peacocks there’s a flagged path. We call it the Peacocks’ Walk. You can’t see it from here, they tell me, but if you squeeze along by the edge of the wood you can turn at the first peacock and get on to the flags.’

It was sacrilege to wake that dreaming house-front with the clatter of machinery, but I swung the car to clear the turf, brushed along the edge of the wood and turned in on the broad stone path where the fountain-basin lay like one star-sapphire.

‘ May I come too?’ she cried. ‘ No, please don’t help me. They’ll like it better if they see me.’

She felt her way lightly to the front of the car, and with one foot on the step she called: ‘ Children, oh, children! Look and see what’s going to happen!’

The voice would have drawn lost souls from the Pit, for the yearning that underlay its sweetness, and I was not surprised to hear an answering shout behind the yews. It must have been the child by the fountain, but he fled at our approach, leaving a little toy boat in the water. I saw the glint of his blue blouse among the still horsemen.

Very disposedly we paraded the length of the walk and at her request backed again. This time the child had got the better of his panic, but stood far off and doubting.

'The little fellow's watching us,' I said. 'I wonder if he'd like a ride.'

'They're very shy still. Very shy. But, oh, lucky you to be able to see them! Let's listen.'

I stopped the machine at once, and the humid stillness, heavy with the scent of box, cloaked us deep. Shears I could hear where some gardener was clipping; a mumble of bees and broken voices that might have been the doves.

'Oh, unkind!' she said wearily.

'Perhaps they're only shy of the motor. The little maid at the window looks tremendously interested.'

'Yes?' She raised her head. 'It was wrong of me to say that. They are really fond of me. It's the only thing that makes life worth living—when they're fond of you, isn't it? I daren't think what the place would be without them. By the way, is it beautiful?'

'I think it is the most beautiful place I have ever seen.'

'So they all tell me. I can feel it, of course, but that isn't quite the same thing.'

'Then have you never——?' I began, but stopped abashed.

'Not since I can remember. It happened when I was only a few months old, they tell me. And yet I must remember something, else how could I dream about colours. I see light in my dreams,

and colours, but I never see *them*. I only hear them just as I do when I’m awake.’

‘It’s difficult to see faces in dreams. Some people can, but most of us haven’t the gift,’ I went on, looking up at the window where the child stood all but hidden.

‘I’ve heard that too,’ she said. ‘And they tell me that one never sees a dead person’s face in a dream. Is that true?’

‘I believe it is—now I come to think of it.’

‘But how is it with yourself—yourself?’ The blind eyes turned towards me.

‘I have never seen the faces of my dead in any dream,’ I answered.

‘Then it must be as bad as being blind.’

The sun had dipped behind the woods and the long shades were possessing the insolent horsemen one by one. I saw the light die from off the top of a glossy-leaved lance and all the brave hard green turn to soft black. The house, accepting another day at end, as it had accepted an hundred thousand gone, seemed to settle deeper into its rest among the shadows.

‘Have you ever wanted to?’ she said after the silence.

‘Very much sometimes,’ I replied. ‘The child had left the window as the shadows closed upon it.’

‘Ah! So’ve I, but I don’t suppose it’s allowed. . . . Where d’you live?’

‘Quite the other side of the county—sixty miles and more, and I must be going back. I’ve come without my big lamps.’

'But it's not dark yet. I can feel it.'

'I'm afraid it will be by the time I get home. Could you lend me someone to set me on my road at first? I've utterly lost myself.'

'I'll send Madden with you to the cross-roads. We are so out of the world, I don't wonder you were lost! I'll guide you round to the front of the house; but you will go slowly, won't you, till you're out of the grounds? It isn't foolish, do you think?'

'I promise you I'll go like this,' I said, and let the car start herself down the flagged path.

We skirted the left wing of the house, whose elaborately cast lead guttering alone was worth a day's journey; passed under a great rose-grown gate in the red wall, and so round to the high front of the house, which in beauty and stateliness as much excelled the back as that all others I had seen.

'Is it so very beautiful?' she said wistfully when she heard my raptures. 'And you like the lead figures too? There's the old azalea garden behind. They say that this place must have been made for children. Will you help me out, please? I should like to come with you as far as the cross-roads, but I mustn't leave them. Is that you, Madden? I want you to show this gentleman the way to the cross-roads. He has lost his way, but—he has seen them.'

A butler appeared noiselessly at the miracle of old oak that must be called the front door, and slipped aside to put on his hat. She stood looking at me with open blue eyes in which no sight

lay, and I saw for the first time that she was beautiful. •

'Remember,' she said quietly, 'if you are fond of them you will come again,' and disappeared within the house.

The butler in the car said nothing till we were nearly at the lodge gates, where catching a glimpse of a blue blouse in a shrubbery I swerved amply lest the devil that leads little boys to play should drag me into child-murder.

'Excuse me,' he asked of a sudden, 'but why did you do that, Sir?'

'The child yonder.'

'Our young gentleman in blue?'

'Of course.'

'He runs about a good deal. Did you see him by the fountain, Sir?'

'Oh, yes, several times. Do we turn here?'

'Yes, Sir. And did you 'appen to see them upstairs too?'

'At the upper window? Yes.'

'Was that before the mistress come out to speak to you, Sir?'

'A little before that. Why d'you want to know?'

He paused a little. 'Only to make sure that—that they had seen the car, Sir, because with children running about, though I'm sure you're driving particularly careful, there might be an accident. That was all, Sir. Here are the cross-roads. You can't miss your way from now on. Thank you, Sir, but that isn't *our* custom, not with——'

'I beg your pardon,' I said, and thrust away the British silver.

'Oh, it's quite right with the rest of 'em as a rule. Good-bye, Sir.'

He retired into the armour-plated conning-tower of his caste and walked away. Evidently a butler solicitous for the honour of his house, and interested, probably through a maid, in the nursery.

Once beyond the signposts at the cross-roads I looked back, but the crumpled hills interlaced so jealously that I could not see where the house had lain. When I asked its name at a cottage along the road, the fat woman who sold sweetmeats there gave me to understand that people with motor cars had small right to live—much less to 'go about talking like carriage folk.' They were not a pleasant-mannered community.

When I retraced my route on the map that evening I was little wiser. Hawkin's Old Farm appeared to be the Survey title of the place, and the old County Gazetteer, generally so ample, did not allude to it. 'The big house of those parts was Hodnington Hall, Georgian with early Victorian embellishments, as an atrocious steel engraving attested. I carried my difficulty to a neighbour—a deep-rooted tree of that soil—and he gave me a name of a family which conveyed no meaning.

A month or so later—I went again, or it may have been that my car took the road of her own volition. She over-ran the fruitless Downs, threaded every turn of the maze of lanes below

the hills, drew through the high-walled woods, impenetrable in their full leaf, came out at the cross-roads where the butler had left me, and a little farther on developed an internal trouble which forced me to turn her in on a grass way-waste that cut into a summer-silent hazel wood. So far as I could make sure by the sun and a six-inch Ordnance map, this should be the road flank of that wood which I had first explored from the heights above. I made a mighty serious business of my repairs and a glittering shop of my repair kit, spanners, pump, and the like, which I spread out orderly upon a rug. It was a trap to catch all childhood, for on such a day, I argued, the children would not be far off. When I paused in my work I listened, but the wood was so full of the noises of summer (though the birds had mated) that I could not at first distinguish these from the tread of small cautious feet stealing across the dead leaves. I rang my bell in an alluring manner, but the feet fled, and I repented, for to a child a sudden noise is very real terror. I must have been at work half an hour when I heard in the wood the voice of the blind woman crying: 'Children, oh, children! Where are you?' and the stillness made slow to close on the perfection of that cry. She came towards me, half feeling her way between the tree boles, and though a child, it seemed, clung to her skirt, it swerved into the leafage like a rabbit as she drew nearer.

'Is that you?' she said, 'from the other side of the county?'

'Yes, it's me from the other side of the county.'

'Then why didn't you come through the upper woods? They were there just now.'

'They were here a few minutes ago. I expect they knew my car had broken down, and came to see the fun.'

'Nothing serious, I hope? How do cars break down?'

'In fifty different ways. Only mine has chosen the fifty-first.'

She laughed merrily at the tiny joke, cooed with delicious laughter, and pushed her hat back.

'Let me hear,' she said.

'Wait a moment,' I cried, 'and I'll get you a cushion.'

She set her foot on the rug all covered with spare parts, and stooped above it eagerly. 'What delightful things!' The hands through which she saw glanc^d in the chequered sunlight. 'A box here—another^{er} box! Why, you've arranged them like playing sh^{hop}!'

'I confess now that I put ^{it} out to attract them. I don't need half those things^{really}.'

'How nice of you! I heard your bell^{all} in the upper wood. You say they were here^{before} that?'

'I'm sure of it. Why are they so shy? That little fellow in blue who was with you just now ought to have got over his fright. He's been watching me like a Red Indian.'

'It must have been your bell,' she said. 'I heard one of them go past me in trouble when I

was coming down. They’re shy—so shy even with me.’ She turned her face over her shoulder and cried again: ‘Children, oh, children! Look and see!’

‘They must have gone off together on their own affairs,’ I suggested, for there was a murmur behind us of lowered voices broken by the sudden squeaking giggles of childhood. I returned to my tinkering and she leaned forward, her chin on her hand, listening interestedly.

‘How many are they?’ I said at last. The work was finished, but I saw no reason to go.

Her forehead puckered a little in thought. ‘I don’t quite know,’ she said simply. ‘Sometimes more—sometimes less. They come and stay with me because I love them, you see.’

‘That must be very jolly,’ I said, replacing a drawer, and as I spoke I heard the inanity of my answer.

‘You—you aren’t laughing at me?’ she cried. ‘I—I haven’t any of my own. I never married. People laugh at me sometimes about them because—because—’

‘Because they’re savages,’ I returned. ‘It’s nothing to fret for. That sort laugh at everything that isn’t in their own fat lives.’

‘I don’t know. How should I? I only don’t like being laughed at about *them*. It hurts; and when one can’t see. . . . I don’t want to seem silly,’ her chin quivered like a child’s as she spoke, ‘but we blindies have only one skin, I think. Everything outside hits straight at our souls. It’s different with you. You’ve such good defences

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in your eyes—looking out—before anyone can really pain you in your soul. People forget that with us.'

I was silent, reviewing that inexhaustible matter—the more than inherited (since it is also carefully taught) brutality of the Christian peoples, beside which the mere heathendom of the West Coast nigger is clean and restrained. It led me a long distance into myself.

'Don't do that!' she said of a sudden, putting her hands before her eyes.

'What?'

She made a gesture with her hand.

'That! It's—it's all purple and black. Don't! That colour hurts.'

'But how in the world do you know about colours?' I exclaimed, for here was a revelation indeed.

'Colours as colours?' she asked.

'No. *Those* Colours which you saw just now.'

'You know as well as I do,' she laughed, 'else you wouldn't have asked that question. They aren't in the world at all. They're in *you*—when you went so angry.'

'D'you mean a dull purplish patch, like port wine mixed with ink?' I said.

'I've never seen ink or port wine, but the colours aren't mixed. They are separate—all separate.'

'Do you mean black streaks and jags across the purple?'

She nodded. 'Yes—if they are like this,' and

zig-zagged her finger again, ‘but it’s more red than purple—that bad colour.’

‘And what are the colours at the top of the—whatever you see?’

Slowly she leaned forward and traced on the rug the figure of the Egg itself.

‘I see them so,’ she said, pointing with a grass stem, ‘white, green, yellow, red, purple, and when people are angry or bad, black across the red—as you were just now.’

‘Who told you anything about it—in the beginning?’ I demanded.

‘About the colours? No one. I used to ask what colours were when I was little—in table-covers and curtains and carpets, you see—because some colours hurt me and some made me happy. People told me; and when I got older that was how I saw people.’ Again she traced the outline of the Egg which it is given to very few of us to see.

‘All by yourself?’ I repeated.

‘All by myself. There wasn’t anyone else. I only found out afterwards that other people did not see the Colours.’

She leaned against the tree-bole plaiting and unplaiting chance-plucked grass stems. The children in the wood had drawn nearer. I could see them with the tail of my eye frolicking like squirrels.

‘Now I am sure you will never laugh at me,’ she went on after a long silence. ‘Nor at *them*.’

‘Goodness! No!’ I cried, jolted out of my

train of thought. ' A man who laughs at a child—unless the child is laughing too—is a heathen! '

' I didn't mean that, of course. You'd never laugh *at* children, but I thought—I used to think—that perhaps you might laugh about *them*. So now I beg your pardon. . . . What are you going to laugh at? '

I had made no sound, but she knew.

' At the notion of your begging my pardon. If you had done your duty as a pillar of the State and a landed proprietress you ought to have summoned me for trespass when I barged through your woods the other day. It was disgraceful of me—inexcusable.'

She looked at me, her head against the tree-trunk—long and steadfastly—this woman who could see the naked soul.

' How curious,' she half whispered. ' How very curious.'

' Why, what have I done? '

' You don't understand . . . and yet you understood about the Colours. Don't you understand? '

She spoke with a passion that nothing had justified, and I faced her bewilderedly as she rose. The children had gathered themselves in a roundel behind a bramble bush. One sleek head bent over something smaller, and the set of the little shoulders told me that fingers were on lips. They, too, had some child's tremendous secret. I alone was hopelessly astray there in the broad sunlight.

' No,' I said, and shook my head as though the dead eyes could note. ' Whatever it is, I don't

understand yet. Perhaps I shall later—if you’ll let me come again.’

‘You will come again,’ she answered. ‘You will surely come again and walk in the wood.’

‘Perhaps the children will know me well enough by that time to let me play with them—as a favour. You know what children are like.’

‘It isn’t a matter of favour but of right,’ she replied, and while I wondered what she meant, a dishevelled woman plunged round the bend of the road, loose-haired, purple, almost lowing with agony as she ran. It was my rude, fat friend of the sweetmeat shop. The blind woman heard and stepped forward. ‘What is it, Mrs. Madehurst?’ she asked.

The woman flung her apron over her head and literally grovelled in the dust, crying that her grandchild was sick to death, that the local doctor was away fishing, that Jenny the mother was at her wits’ end, and so forth, with repetitions and bellowings.

‘Where’s the next nearest doctor?’ I asked between paroxysms.

‘Madden will tell you. Go round to the house and take him with you. I’ll attend to this. Be quick!’ She half supported the fat woman into the shade. In two minutes I was blowing all the horns of Jericho under the front of the House Beautiful, and Madden, in the pantry, rose to the crisis like a butler and a man.

A quarter of an hour at illegal speeds caught us a doctor five miles away. Within the half-hour we had decanted him, much interested in motors,

at the door of the sweetmeat shop, and drew up the road to await the verdict.

' Useful things cars,' said Madden, all man and no butler. ' If I'd had one when mine took sick she wouldn't have died.'

' How was it?' I asked.

' Croup. Mrs. Madden was away. No one knew what to do. I drove eight miles in a tax-cart for the doctor. She was choked when we came back. This car 'd ha' saved her. She'd have been close on ten now.'

' I'm sorry,' I said. ' I thought you were rather fond of children from what you told me going to the cross-roads the other day.'

' Have you seen 'em again, Sir—this mornin'?'

' Yes, but they're well broke to cars. I couldn't get any of them within twenty yards of it.'

He looked at me carefully as a scout considers a stranger—not as a menial should lift his eyes to his divinely appointed superior.

' I wonder why,' he said just above the breath that he drew.

We waited on. A light wind from the sea wandered up and down the long lines of the woods, and the wayside grasses, whitened already with summer dust, rose and bowed in sallow waves.

A woman, wiping the suds off her arms, came out of the cottage next the sweetmeat shop.

' I've be'n listenin' in de back-yard,' she said cheerily. ' He says Arthur's unaccountable bad. Did ye hear him shruck just now? Unaccountable bad. I reckon t'will come Jenny's turn to walk in de wood nex' week along, Mr. Madden.'

‘ Excuse me, Sir, but your lap-robe is slipping,’ said Madden deferentially. The woman started, dropped a curtsey, and hurried away.

‘ What does she mean by “ walking in the wood ” ? ’ I asked.

‘ It must be some saying they use hereabouts. I’m from Norfolk myself,’ said Madden. ‘ They’re an independent lot in this county. She took you for a chauffeur, Sir.’

I saw the Doctor come out of the cottage followed by a draggle-tailed wench who clung to his arm as though he could make treaty for her with Death. ‘ Dat sort,’ she wailed—‘ dey’re just as much to us dat has ’em as if dey was lawful born. Just as much—just as much! An’ God he’d be just as pleased if you saved ’un, Doctor. Don’t take it from me. Miss Florence will tell ye de very same. Don’t leave ’im, Doctor!’

‘ I know, I know,’ said the man; ‘ but he’ll be quiet for a while now. We’ll get the nurse and the medicine as fast as we can.’ He signalled me to come forward with the car, and I strove not to be privy to what followed; but I saw the girl’s face, blotched and frozen with grief, and I felt the hand without a ring clutching at my knees when we moved away.

The Doctor was a man of some humour, for I remember he claimed my car under the Oath of *Æsculapius*, and used it and me without mercy. First we convoyed Mrs. Madehurst and the blind woman to wait by the sick-bed till the nurse should come. Next we invaded a neat county town for prescriptions (the Doctor said the trouble

was cerebro-spinal meningitis), and when the County Institute, banked and flanked with scared market cattle, reported itself out of nurses for the moment we literally flung ourselves loose upon the county. We conferred with the owners of great houses—magnates at the ends of overarching avenues whose big-boned womenfolk strode away from their tea-tables to listen to the imperious Doctor. At last a white-haired lady sitting under a cedar of Lebanon and surrounded by a court of magnificent Borzois—all hostile to motors—gave the Doctor, who received them as from a princess, written orders which we bore many miles at top speed, through a park, to a French nunnery, where we took over in exchange a pallid-faced and trembling Sister. She knelt at the bottom of the tonneau telling her beads without pause till, by short cuts of the Doctor's invention, we had her to the sweetmeat shop once more. It was a long afternoon crowded with mad episodes that rose and dissolved like the dust of our wheels; cross-sections of remote and incomprehensible lives through which we raced at right angles; and I went home in the dusk, wearied out, to dream of the clashing horns of cattle; round-eyed nuns walking in a garden of graves; pleasant tea-parties beneath shady trees; the carbolic-scented, grey-painted corridors of the County Institute; the steps of shy children in the wood, and the hands that clung to my knees as the motor began to move.

I had intended to return in a day or two, but it

pleased Fate to hold me from that side of the county, on many pretexts, till the elder and the wild rose had fruited. There came at last a brilliant day, swept clear from the south-west, that brought the hills within hand's reach—a day of unstable airs and high filmy clouds. 'Through no merit of my own I was free, and set the car for the third time on that known road. As I reached the crest of the Downs I felt the soft air change, saw it glaze under the sun; and, looking down at the sea, in that instant beheld the blue of the Channel turn through polished silver and dulled steel to dingy pewter. A laden collier hugging the coast steered outward for deeper water, and, across copper-coloured haze, I saw sails rise one by one on the anchored fishing-fleet. In a deep dene behind me an eddy of sudden wind drummed through sheltered oaks, and spun aloft the first dry sample of autumn leaves. When I reached the beach road the sea-fog fumed over the brickfields, and the tide was telling all the groynes of the gale beyond Ushant. In less than an hour summer England vanished in chill grey. ' We were again the shut island of the North, all the ships of the world bellowing at our perilous gates; and between their outcries ran the piping of bewildered gulls. My cap dripped moisture, the folds of the rug held it in pools or sluiced it away in runnels, and the salt-rime stuck to my lips.

Inland the smell of autumn loaded the thickened fog among the trees, and the drip became a continuous shower. Yet the late flowers—mallow of the wayside, scabious of the field, and dahlia

of the garden—showed gay in the mist, and beyond the sea's breath there was little sign of decay in the leaf. Yet in the villages the house doors were all open, and bare-legged, bare-headed children sat at ease on the damp doorsteps to shout 'pip-pip' at the stranger.

I made bold to call at the sweetmeat shop, where Mrs. Madehurst met me with a fat woman's hospitable tears. Jenny's child, she said, had died two days after the nun had come. It was, she felt, best out of the way, even though insurance offices, for reasons which she did not pretend to follow, would not willingly insure such stray lives. 'Not but what Jenny didn't tend to Arthur as though he'd come all proper at de end of de first year—like Jenny herself.' Thanks to Miss Florence, the child had been buried with a pomp which, in Mrs. Madehurst's opinion, more than covered the small irregularity of its birth. She described the coffin, within and without, the glass hearse, and the evergreen lining of the grave.

'But how's the mother?' I asked.

'Jenny? Oh, she'll get over it. I've felt dat way with one or two o' my own. She'll get over. She's walkin' in de wood now.'

'In this weather?'

Mrs. Madehurst looked at me with narrowed eyes across the counter.

'I dunno but it opens de 'eart like. Yes, it opens de 'eart. Dat's where losin' and bearin' comes so alike in de long run, we do say.'

Now the wisdom of the old wives is greater

than that of all the Fathers, and this last oracle sent me thinking so extendedly as I went up the road, that I nearly ran over a woman and a child at the wooded corner by the lodge gates of the House Beautiful.

‘ Awful weather ! ’ I cried, as I slowed dead for the turn.

‘ Not so bad,’ she answered placidly out of the fog. ‘ Mine’s used to ’un. You’ll find yours indoors, I reckon.’

Indoors, Madden received me with professional courtesy, and kind inquiries for the health of the motor, which he would put under cover.

I waited in a still, nut-brown hall, pleasant with late flowers and warmed with a delicious wood fire—a place of good influence and great peace. (Men and women may sometimes, after great effort, achieve a creditable lie ; but the house, which is their temple, cannot say anything save the truth of those who have lived in it.) A child’s cart and a doll lay on the black-and-white floor, where a rug had been kicked back. I felt that the children had only just hurried away—to hide themselves, most like—in the many turns of the great adzed staircase that climbed statelily out of the hall, or to crouch at gaze behind the lions and roses of the carven gallery above. Then I heard her voice above me, singing as the blind sing—from the soul :—

In the pleasant orchard-closes.

And all my early summer came back at the call.

In the pleasant orchard-closes,
God bless all our gains say 'we—
But may God bless all our losses,
Better suits with our degree.

She dropped the marring fifth line, and repeated

Better suits with our degree !

I saw her lean over the gallery, her linked hands white as pearl against the oak.

' Is that you—from the other side of the county ? ' she called.

' Yes, me—from the other side of the county,' I answered, laughing.

' What a long time before you had to come here again.' She ran down the stairs, one hand lightly touching the broad rail. ' It's two months and four days. Summer's gone ! '

' I meant to come before, but Fate prevented.'

' I knew it. Please do something to that fire. They won't let me play with it, but I can feel it's behaving badly. Hit it ! '

I looked on, either side of the deep fireplace, and found but a half-charred hedge-stake with which I punched a black log into flame.

' It never goes out, day or night,' she said, as though explaining. ' In case any one comes in with cold toes, you see.'

' It's even lovelier inside than it was out,' I murmured. The red light poured itself along the age-polished dusky panels till the Tudor roses and lions of the gallery took colour and motion. An old eagle-topped convex mirror gathered the picture into its mysterious heart, distorting afresh

the distorted shadows, and curving the gallery lines into the curves of a ship. The day was shutting down in half a gale as the fog turned to stringy scud. Through the uncurtained mullions of the broad window I could see the valiant horsemen of the lawn rear and recover against the wind that taunted them with legions of dead leaves.

'Yes, it must be beautiful,' she said. 'Would you like to go over it? There's still light enough upstairs.'

I followed her up the unflinching, wagon-wide staircase to the gallery whence opened the thin fluted Elizabethan doors.

'Feel how they put the latch low down for the sake of the children.' She swung a light door inward.

'By the way, where are they?' I asked. 'I haven't even heard them to-day.'

She did not answer at once. Then, 'I can only hear them,' she replied softly. 'This is one of their rooms—everything ready, you see.'

She pointed into a heavily-timbered room. There were little low gate tables and children's chairs. A doll's house, its hooked front half open, faced a great dappled rocking-horse, from whose padded saddle it was but a child's scramble to the broad window-seat overlooking the lawn. A toy gun lay in a corner beside a gilt wooden cannon.

'Surely they've only just gone,' I whispered. In the failing light a door creaked cautiously. I heard the rustle of a frock and the patter of feet—quick feet through a room beyond.

'I heard that,' she cried triumphantly. 'Did you? Children, oh, children! Where are you?'

The voice filled the walls that held it lovingly to the last perfect note, but there came no answering shout such as I had heard in the garden. We hurried on from room to oak-floored room; up a step here, down three steps there; among a maze of passages; always mocked by our quarry. One might as well have tried to work an unstopped warren with a single ferret. There were bolt-holes innumerable—recesses in walls, embrasures of deep-slitten windows now darkened, whence they could start up behind us; and abandoned fireplaces, six feet deep in the masonry, as well as the tangle of communicating doors. Above all, they had the twilight for their helper in our game. I had caught one or two joyous chuckles of evasion, and once or twice had seen the silhouette of a child's frock against some darkening window at the end of a passage; but we returned empty-handed to the gallery, just as a middle-aged woman was setting a lamp in its niche.

'No, I haven't seen her either this evening, Miss Florence,' I heard her say, 'but that Turpin he says he wants to see you about his shed.'

'Oh, Mr. Turpin must want to see me very badly. Tell him to come to the hall, Mrs. Madden.'

I looked down into the hall whose only light was the dulled fire, and deep in the shadow I saw them at last. They must have slipped down while we were in the passages, and now thought themselves perfectly hidden behind an old gilt leather

screen. By child's law, my fruitless chase was as good as an introduction, but since I had taken so much trouble I resolved to force them to come forward later by the simple trick, which children detest, of pretending not to notice them. They lay close, in a little huddle, no more than shadows except when a quick flame betrayed an outline.

'And now we'll have some tea,' she said. 'I believe I ought to have offered it you at first, but one doesn't arrive at manners somehow when one lives alone and is considered—h'm—peculiar.' Then with very pretty scorn, 'Would you like a lamp to see to eat by?'

'The firelight's much pleasanter, I think.' We descended into that delicious gloom and Madden brought tea.

I took my chair in the direction of the screen ready to surprise or be surprised as the game should go, and at her permission, since a hearth is always sacred, bent forward to play with the fire.

'Where do you get these beautiful short faggots from?' I asked idly. 'Why, they are tallies!'

'Of course,' she said. 'As I can't read or write I'm driven back on the early English tally for my accounts. Give me one and I'll tell you what it meant.'

I passed her an unburned hazel-tally, about a foot long, and she ran her thumb down the nicks.

'This is the milk-record for the home farm for the month of April last year, in gallons,' said she. 'I don't know what I should have done without tallies. An old forester of mine taught

me the system. It's out of date now for every one else; but my tenants respect it. One of them's coming now to see me. Oh, it doesn't matter. He has no business here out of office hours. He's a greedy, ignorant man—very greedy, or—he wouldn't come here after dark.'

'Have you much land then?'

'Only a couple of hundred acres in hand, thank goodness. The other six hundred are nearly all let to folk who knew my folk before me, but this Turpin is quite a new man—and a highway robber.'

'But are you sure I shan't be——?'

'Certainly not. You have the right. He hasn't any children.'

'Ah, the children!' I said, and slid my low chair back till it nearly touched the screen that hid them. 'I wonder whether they'll come out for me.'

There was a murmur of voices—Madden's and a deeper note—at the low, dark side door, and a ginger-headed, canvas-gaitered giant of the unmistakable tenant-farmer type stumbled or was pushed in.

'Come to the fire, Mr. Turpin,' she said.

'If—if you please, Miss, I'll—I'll be quite as well by the door.' He clung to the latch as he spoke like a frightened child. Of a sudden I realised that he was in the grip of some almost overpowering fear.

'Well?'

'About that new shed for the young stock—that was all. These first autumn storms settin' in

. . . but I’ll come again, Miss.’ His teeth did not chatter much more than the door-latch.

‘I think not,’ she answered levelly. ‘The new shed—m’m. What did my agent write you on the 15th?’

‘I—fancied p’raps that if I came to see you—ma—man to man like, Miss. But——’

His eyes rolled into every corner of the room wide with horror. He half opened the door through which he had entered, but I noticed it shut again—from without and firmly.

‘He wrote what I told him,’ she went on. ‘You are overstocked already. Dunnett’s Farm never carried more than fifty bullocks—even in Mr. Wright’s time. And *he* used cake. You’ve sixty-seven and you don’t cake. You’ve broken the lease in that respect. You’re dragging the heart out of the farm.’

‘I’m—I’m getting some minerals—superphosphates—next week. I’ve as good as ordered a truck-load already. I’ll go down to the station to-morrow about ’em. Then I can come and see you man to man like, Miss, in the daylight. . . . That gentleman’s not going away, is he?’ He almost shrieked.

I had only slid the chair a little farther back, reaching behind me to tap on the leather of the screen, but he jumped like a rat.

‘No. Please attend to me, Mr. Turpin.’ She turned in her chair and faced him with his back to the door. It was an old and sordid little piece of scheming that she forced from him—his plea for the new cow-shed at his landlady’s expense, that

he might with the covered manure pay his next year's rent out of the valuation after, as she made clear, he had bled the enriched pastures to the bone. I could not but admire the intensity of his greed, when I saw him outfacing for its sake whatever terror it was that ran wet on his forehead.

I ceased to tap the leather—was, indeed, calculating the cost of the shed—when I felt my relaxed hand taken and turned softly between the soft hands of a child. So at last I had triumphed. In a moment I would turn and acquaint myself with those quick-footed wanderers. . . .

The little brushing kiss fell in the centre of my palm—as a gift on which the fingers were, once, expected to close: as the all-faithful half-reproachful signal of a waiting child not used to neglect even when grown-ups were busiest—a fragment of the mute code devised very long ago.

Then I knew. And it was as though I had known from the first day when I looked across the lawn at the high window.

I heard the door shut. The woman turned to me in silence, and I felt that she knew.

What time passed after this I cannot say. I was roused by the fall of a log, and mechanically rose to put it back. Then I returned to my place in the chair very close to the screen.

'Now you understand,' she whispered, across the packed shadows.

'Yes, I understand—now. Thank you.'

'I—I only hear them.' She bowed her head

in her hands. ‘I have no right, you know—no other right. • I have neither borne nor lost—neither borne nor lost!’

‘Be very glad then,’ said I, for my soul was torn open within me.

‘Forgive me!’

She was still, and I went back to my sorrow and my joy.

‘It was because I loved them so,’ she said at last, brokenly. ‘*That* was why it was, even from the first—even before I knew that they—they were all I should ever have. And I loved them so!’

She stretched out her arms to the shadows and the shadows within the shadow.

‘They came because I loved them—because I needed them. I—I must have made them come. Was that wrong, think you?’

‘No—no.’

‘I—I grant you that the toys and—and all that sort of thing were nonsense, but—but I used to so hate empty rooms myself when I was little.’ She pointed to the gallery. ‘And the passages all empty. . . . And how could I ever bear the garden door shut? Suppose——’

‘Don’t! For pity’s sake, don’t!’ I cried. The twilight had brought a cold rain with gusty squalls that plucked at the leaded windows.

‘And the same thing with keeping the fire in all night. I don’t think it so foolish—do you?’

I looked at the broad brick hearth, saw, through tears, I believe, that there was no unpassable iron on or near it, and bowed my head.

‘I did all that and lots of other things—just to

make believe. Then they came. I heard them, but I didn't know that they were not mine by right till Mrs. Madden told me——'

'The butler's wife? What?'

'One of them—I heard—she saw. And knew Hers! *Not* for me. I didn't know at first. Perhaps I was jealous. Afterwards, I began to understand that it was only because I loved them, not because—— . . . Oh, you *must* bear or lose,' she said piteously. 'There is no other way—and yet they love me. They must! Don't they?'

There was no sound in the room except the lapping voices of the fire, but we two listened intently, and she at least took comfort from what she heard. She recovered herself and half rose. I sat still in my chair by the screen.

'Don't think me a wretch to whine about myself like this, but—but I'm all in the dark, you know, and *you* can see.'

In truth I could see, and my vision confirmed me in my resolve, though that was like the very parting of spirit and flesh. Yet a little longer I would stay since it was the last time.

'You think it is wrong, then?' she cried sharply, though I had said nothing.

'Not for you. A thousand times no. For you it is right. . . . I am grateful to you beyond words. For me it would be wrong. For me only. . . .'

'Why?' she said, but passed her hand before her face as she had done at our second meeting in the wood. 'Oh, I see,' she went on simply as a child. 'For you it would be wrong.' Then

with a little indrawn laugh, ‘ And, d’you remember, I called you lucky—once—at first. You who must never come here again ! ’

She left me to sit a little longer by the screen, and I heard the sound of her feet die out along the gallery above.

POEMS

The Love Song of Har Dyal

ALONE upon the housetops to the North
I turn and watch the lightnings in the sky—
The glamour of thy footsteps in the North.
Come back to me, Beloved, or I die!

Below my feet the still bazar is laid—
Far, far below the weary camels lie—
The camels and the captives of thy raid.
Come back to me, Beloved, or I die!

My father's wife is old and harsh with years,
And drudge of all my father's house am I—
My bread is sorrow, and my drink is tears.
Come back to me, Beloved, or I die!

The Way through the Woods

THEY shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
And now you would never know

There was once a road through the woods
Before they planted the trees.
It is underneath the coppice and heath
And the thin anemones.
Only the keeper sees
That, where the ring-dove broods,
And the badgers roll at ease,
There was once a road through the woods.

Yet, if you enter the woods
Of a summer evening late,
When the night-air cools on the trout-ringed
pools
Where the otter whistles his mate,
(They fear not men in the woods,
Because they see so few.)
You will hear the beat of a horse's feet,
And the swish of a skirt in the dew,
Steadily cantering through
The misty solitudes,
As though they perfectly knew
The old lost road through the woods . . .
But there is no road through the woods!

Puck's Song

SEE you the ferny ride that steals
Into the oak-woods far?
Oh, that was whence they hewed the keels
That rolled to Trafalgar.

And mark you where the ivy clings
To Bayham's mouldering walls?
Oh, there we cast the stout railings
That stand around St. Paul's.

See you the dimpled track that runs
All hollow through the wheat?
Oh, that was where they hauled the guns
That smote King Philip's fleet.

(Out of the Weald, the secret Weald,
Men sent in ancient years
The horse-shoes red at Flodden Field,
The arrows at Poitiers!)

See you our little mill that clacks,
So busy by the brook?
She has ground her corn and paid her tax
Ever since Domesday Book.

See you our stilly woods of oak,
And the dread ditch beside?
Oh, that was where the Saxons broke
On the day that Harold died.

See you the windy levels spread
About the gates of Rye?
Oh, that was where the Northmen fled,
When Alfred's ships came by.

See you our pastures wide and lone,
Where the red oxen browse?
Oh, there was a City thronged and known,
Ere London boasted a house.

And see you, after rain, the trace
Of mound and ditch and wall?
Oh, that was a Legion's camping-place,
When Caesar sailed from Gaul.

And see you marks that show and fade,
Like shadows on the Downs?
Oh, they are the lines the Flint Men made,
To guard their wondrous towns.

Trackway and Camp and City lost,
Salt Marsh where now is corn—
Old Wars, old Peace, old Arts that cease,
And so was England born!

She is not any common earth,
Water or wood or air,
But Merlin's Isle of Gramarye,
Where you and I will fare!

‘Our Fathers of Old’

EXCELLENT herbs had our fathers of old—

Excellent herbs to ease their pain—
Alexanders and Marigold,

Eyebright, Orris, and Elecampane—
Basil, Rocket, Valerian, Rue,

(Almost singing themselves they run)
Vervain, Dittany, Call-me-to-you—

Cowslip, Melilot, Rose of the Sun.

Anything green that grew out of the mould
Was an excellent herb to our fathers of old.

Wonderful tales had our fathers of old,
Wonderful tales of the herbs and the stars—
The Sun was Lord of the Marigold,
Basil and Rocket belonged to Mars.
Pat as a sum in division it goes—
(Every herb had a planet bespoke)—
Who but Venus should govern the Rose?
Who but Jupiter own the Oak?
Simply and gravely the facts are told
In the wonderful books of our fathers of
old.

Wonderful little, when all is said,
Wonderful little our fathers knew.
Half their remedies cured you dead—
Most of their teaching was quite untrue—
'Look at the stars when a patient is ill
(Dirt has nothing to do with disease),
Bleed and blister as much as you will,
Blister and bleed him as oft as you please.'
Whence enormous and manifold
Errors were made by our fathers of old.

Yet when the sickness was sore in the land,
And neither planets nor herbs assuaged,
They took their lives in their lancet-hand
And, oh, what a wonderful war they waged!
Yes, when the crosses were chalked on the door—
(Yes, when the terrible dead-cart rolled !)
Excellent courage our fathers bore—
Excellent heart had our fathers of old.
None too learned, but nobly bold,
Into the fight went our fathers of old.

If it be certain, as Galen says—

And sage Hippocrates holds as much—
'That those afflicted by doubts and dismays
Are mightily helped by a dead man's touch,'
Then, be good to us, stars above!

Then, be good to us, herbs below!
We are afflicted by what we can prove,
We are distracted by what we know.

So—ah, so!

Down from your heaven or up from your
mould,
Send us the hearts of our fathers of old!

The Heritage

OUR fathers in a wondrous age,
Ere yet the Earth was small,
Ensured to us an heritage,
And doubted not at all
That we, the children of their heart,
Which then did beat so high,
In later time should play like part
For our posterity.

A thousand years they steadfast built,
To 'vantage us and ours,
The Walls that were a world's despair,
The sea-constraining Towers:
Yet in their midmost pride they knew,
And unto Kings made known,
Not all from these their strength they drew,
Their faith from brass or stone.

Youth's passion, manhood's fierce intent,
With age's judgment wise,
They spent, and counted not they spent,
At daily sacrifice.

Not lambs alone nor purchased doves
Or tithe of trader's gold—
Their lives most dear, their dearer loves,
They offered up of old.

Refraining e'en from lawful things,
They bowed the neck to bear
The unadornèd yoke that brings
Stark toil and sternest care.
Wherefore through them is Freedom sure;
Wherefore through them we stand,
From all but sloth and pride secure,
In a delightful land.

Then, fretful, murmur not they gave
So great a charge to keep,
Nor dream that awestruck Time shall save
Their labour while we sleep.
Dear-bought and clear, a thousand year,
Our fathers' title runs.
Make we likewise their sacrifice,
Defrauding not our sons.

The Glory of the Garden

Our England is a garden that is full of stately
views,
Of borders, beds and shrubberies and lawns and
avenues,

With statues on the terraces and peacocks strutting by;
But the Glory of the Garden lies in more than
meets the eye.

For where the old thick laurels grow, along the
thin red wall,
You'll find the tool- and potting-sheds which are
the heart of all;
The cold-frames and the hot-houses, the dungpits
and the tanks,
The rollers, carts and drain-pipes, with the
barrows and the planks.

And there you'll see the gardeners, the men and
'prentice boys
Told off to do as they are bid and do it without
noise;
For, except when seeds are planted and we shout
to scare the birds,
The Glory of the Garden it abideth not in words.

And some can pot begonias and some can bud a
rose,
And some are hardly fit to trust with anything that
grows;
But they can roll and trim the lawns and sift the
sand and loam,
For the Glory of the Garden occupieth all who come.

Our England is a garden, and such gardens are
not made
By singing:—'Oh, how beautiful!' and sitting in
the shade,

While better men than we go out and start their
working lives
At grubbing weeds from gravel-paths with broken
dinner-knives.

There's not a pair of legs so thin, there's not a
head so thick,
There's not a hand so weak and white, nor yet a
heart so sick,
But it can find some needful job that's crying to
be done,
For the Glory of the Garden glorifieth every one.

Then seek your job with thankfulness and work
till further orders,
If it's only netting strawberries or killing slugs on
borders ;
And when your back stops aching and your hands
begin to harden,
You will find yourself a partner in the Glory of
the Garden.

Oh, Adam was a gardener, and God who made
him sees
That half a proper gardener's work is done upon
his knees,
So when your work is finished, you can wash your
hands and pray
For the Glory of the Garden, that it may not pass
away !
*And the Glory of the Garden it shall never pass
away!*

Natural Theology

PRIMITIVE

I ATE my fill of a whale that died
And stranded after a month at sea. . .
There is a pain in my inside.
Why have the Gods afflicted me?
Ow! I am purged till I am a wraith!
Wow! I am sick till I cannot see!
What is the sense of Religion and Faith?
Look how the Gods have afflicted me!

PAGAN

How can the skin of rat or mouse hold
Anything more than a harmless flea? . . .
The burning plague has taken my household.
Why have my Gods afflicted me?
All my kith and kin are deceased,
Though they were as good as good could be.
I will out and batter the family priest,
Because my Gods have afflicted me!

MEDIAEVAL

My privy and well drain into each other
After the custom of Christendie. . . .
Fevers and fluxes are wasting my mother.
Why has the Lord afflicted me?
The Saints are helpless for all I offer—
So are the clergy I used to fee.
Henceforward I keep my cash in my coffer,
Because the Lord has afflicted me.

MATERIAL

I run eight hundred hens to the acre.
They die by dozens mysteriously. . . .
I am more than doubtful concerning my Maker.
Why has the Lord afflicted me?
What a return for all my endeavour—
Not to mention the L. S. D. !
I am an atheist now and for ever,
Because this God has afflicted me !

PROGRESSIVE

Money spent on an Army or Fleet
Is homicidal lunacy. . . .
My son has been killed in the Mons retreat.
Why is the Lord afflicting me?
Why are murder, pillage and arson
And rape allowed by the Deity?
I will write to the *Times*, deriding our parson,
Because my God has afflicted me.

CHORUS

We had a kettle : we let it leak :
Our not repairing it made it worse.
We haven't had any tea for a week. . . .
The bottom is out of the Universe !

CONCLUSION

This was none of the good Lord's pleasure,
For the Spirit He breathed in Man is free ;
But what comes after is measure for measure
And not a God that afflicteth thee.

As was the sowing so the reaping
Is now and evermore shall be.
Thou art delivered to thine own keeping.
Only Thyself hath afflicted thee!

Mine Sweepers

DAWN off the Foreland—the young flood making
Jumbled and short and steep—
Black in the hollows and bright where it's break-
ing—
Awkward water to sweep.
'Mines reported in the fairway,
Warn all traffic and detain.
'Sent up *Unity, Claribel, Assyrian, Stormcock, and
Golden Gain.*'

NOON off the Foreland—the first ebb making
Lumpy and strong in the bight.
Boom after boom, and the golf-hut shaking
And the jackdaws wild with fright!
'Mines located in the fairway,
Boats now working up the chain.
Sweepers—*Unity, Claribel, Assyrian, Stormcock, and
Golden Gain.*'

DUSK off the Foreland—the last light going
And the traffic crowding through,
And five damned trawlers with their syreens
blowing
Heading the whole review!

'Sweep completed in the fairway.
No more mines remain.
'Sent back *Unity, Claribel, Assyrian, Stormcock, and
Golden Gain.*'

A Song in Storm

BE well assured that on our side
The abiding oceans fight,
Though headlong wind and heaping tide
Make us their sport to-night.
By force of weather, not of war,
In jeopardy we steer :
Then welcome Fate's discourtesy
Whereby it shall appear
How in all time of our distress,
And our deliverance too,
The game is more than the player of the
game,
And the ship is more than the crew !

Out of the mist into the mirk
The glimmering combers roll.
Almost these mindless waters work
As though they had a soul—
Almost as though they leagued to whelm
Our flag beneath their green :
Then welcome Fate's discourtesy
Whereby it shall be seen, etc.

Be well assured, though wave and wind
Have mightier blows in store,
That we who keep the watch assigned
Must stand to it the more ;

And as our streaming bows rebuke
Each billow's baulked career,
Sing, welcome Fate's discourtesy
Whereby it is made clear, etc.

No matter though our decks be swept
And mast and timber crack—
We can make good all loss except
The loss of turning back.
So, 'twixt these Devils and our deep,
Bid courteous trumpets sound,
To welcome Fate's discourtesy
Whereby it will be found, etc.

Be well assured, though in our power
Is nothing left to give
But chance and place to meet the hour,
And leave to strive to live,
Till these dissolve our Order holds,
Our Service binds us here.
Then welcome Fate's discourtesy
Whereby it is made clear
How in all time of our distress,
As in our triumph too,
The game is more than the player of the
game,
And the ship is more than the crew!

‘For all we have and are’

For all we have and are,
For all our children’s fate,
Stand up and take the war.
The Hun is at the gate!
Our world has passed away,
In wantonness o’erthrown.
There is nothing left to-day
But steel and fire and stone!
 ‘Though all we knew depart,
 The old Commandments stand :—
 ‘In courage keep your heart,
 In strength lift up your hand.’

Once more we hear the word
That sickened Earth of old :—
‘No Law except the Sword
Unsheathed and uncontrolled.
Once more it knits mankind,
Once more the nations go
To meet and break and bind
A crazed and driven foe.

Comfort, content, delight,
The Ages’ slow-bought gain,
They shrivelled in a night.
Only ourselves remain
To face the naked days
In silent fortitude,
Through perils and dismays
Renewed and re-renewed.

Though all we made depart,
The old Commandments stand:
'In patience keep your heart,
In strength lift up your hand.'

No easy hope or lies
Shall bring us to our goal,
But iron sacrifice
Of body, will, and soul.
There is but one task for all—
One life for each to give.
What stands if Freedom fall?
Who dies if England live?

THE END

